

WORDS BY Adam Woodward

Nic's Hot Line

Nicolas Winding Refn a feminist? However you define that increasingly ambiguous term, it's not an ideology that's synonymous with the Danish writer/director/provocateur. Which is understandable, given that he tends to make visceral, fetishistic films about violent men. And vet the signs are all right there in his work. Take Valhalla Rising, which pits Mads Mikkelsen's one-eyed Viking warrior against pagan crusaders in a primordial world conspicuously devoid of women. Or his best known film to date, Drive, where Ryan Gosling's strong-silent antihero rescues Carey Mulligan's abused single mother. Or Only God Forgives, about a man chained to the womb of his mother, in which Refn simultaneously deconstructs and feminises the homoerotic undertow that simmered under the hood of Drive. Power protects purity. In the 20 years he's been making movies, rarely has Refn strayed from this core theme - these hypermasculine alter egos allow him to explore the world and the different roles men and women play within it. All of which brings us to The Neon Demon...

In Refn's tenth feature, Elle Fanning plays a young model named Jesse who arrives in Los Angeles dreaming of making it in the fashion world. Fresh-faced and vulnerable, she's a lamb waiting to be devoured in an industry run by wolves. The Neon Demon is the first Nicolas Winding Refn film to be told almost exclusively from a female perspective. The primary supporting cast of Jena Malone, Abbey Lee and Bella Heathcote set an ominous tone by channelling the Weird Sisters from Shakespeare's 'Macbeth'. With this flipped perspective in mind, does



Refn see the film as a departure from his previous work? Not exactly. "I always wanted to make a film about the 16-year-old girl inside of me."

I would never have come up with the idea for this movie if I didn't have a beautiful wife. In a way, everything comes back to her."

Wait... what?

NICOLAS WINDING REFN'S
ADVICE TO YOU!

"I've always felt that every man has a 16-year-old girl inside them, and I wanted to make a movie about mine. Going from *Drive* to reentering my mother's womb in *Only God Forgives*, I lived out that fantasy, so now I can make a movie from the point of view of the teenage girl inside of me. It's like being reborn."

Refn clearly gets a rise out of being provocative, yet when interviewing him you get the impression that he sometimes feels misunderstood. The last time we spoke, when Only God Forgives was busy polarising critics at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival, he was quick to dangle a juicy line about wanting to "fuck the audience". For better and worse, Refn got his wish that year. But it always felt like he was putting up a front, a wellrehearsed reaction to the reaction rather than an honest statement of intent. Now, over open sandwiches and pickled herring in a trendy Copenhagen restaurant close to Refn's home, he seems comparatively relaxed when the conversation turns to negative criticism. Is he as thick skinned as he likes to appear? "Of course not," he admits, "but it all depends how many negative reviews there are and whether they affect the box office. With Only God Forgives, I was so positive I was gonna get the Palme d'Or, you know, they might as well have just mailed it to me." He flashes a wry smile. "It didn't work out like that. So on a financial level, ves, I was worried, but on a personal level it was like, 'Well, now I'm the Sex Pistols,' because the kids loved it, the establishment hated it. Who the fuck wants to make films for old people, you know? What's great is the people who really hated Only God Forgives are still talking about it. 'Ching ching!' I make films purely based on what I want to see, but if it makes money then I'm gonna get to do the next one. I just approach everything like, 'How little can I make this for?' It's a healthy thing, I think, because it allows you creative freedom. If you make it exactly how you want to make it, that's the one thing they can't take away from you." How, then, would Refn react if The Neon Demon was universally adored? "Fuck, I made it wrong."

In essence The Neon Demon is about the mystical power of women, who to Refn are "the centre of the universe." But it's also an ode to emotionally strong, superficially beautiful women. When viewed in this light, Refn's decision to adopt a female alter ego takes on a more personal sphere of meaning. Where he dedicated Only God Forgives to

I always think creativity is very feminine. It's the closest I can ever get to being a women."

cult Chilean surrealist Alejandro Jodorowsky (who Refn received tarot readings from every weekend during the production on The Neon Demon), his latest is dedicated to Liv Corfixen, Refn's wife. In 2014 Liv made a film called My Life Directed by Nicolas Winding Refn, documenting the family's temporary relocation to Bangkok for the filming of Only God Forgives. Outwardly, Refn comes across as assertive and full of confidence, but this intimate home movie reveals a different side to him. Apparently racked with anxiety and self-doubt, he questions virtually every creative decision he makes and visibly cracks under the added strain of having Liv and their two young daughters around. As fascinating as it is to see Refn exposed in this way, the fact that he put himself under intense pressure in pursuit of artistic fulfilment and commercial success is hardly surprising given his career trajectory.

Refn's brief and disastrous flirt with Hollywood in the early 2000s is well documented, but as as a valuable cautionary tale for aspiring directors everywhere it's a story that's worth retelling. After turning heads with two stylish micro-budget street thrillers, 1996's *Pusher* and 1999's *Bleeder*, Refn arrived in Los Angeles with fame firmly in his sights. *Fear X* didn't so much crash and burn as stall on the grid, bankrupting Refn's production company Jang Go Star and leaving him in massive personal

debt (at one point he owed his bank \$1m). "That film failed on every level," he reflects, "and it deserved to fail on every level. Even the title was bad. At the time I thought I was making what would be perceived as the greatest film ever made. It turned out to be the exact opposite. But I was making a movie about my ego. It was all about vanity and what I thought a good film was supposed to be. When it failed, whatever I had before just evaporated." He continues: "I thank God every day for allowing me to fail once. If it wasn't for that I wouldn't have gone to England, I wouldn't have done Bronson and we probably wouldn't be here having this conversation. Failure - I'm talking earthquake-level failure - teaches you two things: it's not the end of the world, and are you gonna man up or give up? I will never be bitter in my life, I will not allow that. So I had to man up. It was also around the same time that we had our first child, so I really had no choice but to take responsibility."

Was the fear of failure there on The Neon Demon?

"Oh veah, it's constant," Refn confesses. "It's like getting my period: I know it's going to come and when it does I'm going to bitch and moan about it. But you can never show it to anyone. Not the crew or the cast. Only Liv sees that. When I get through it I feel relieved and full of life. I always think creativity is very feminine. It's the closest I can ever get to being a woman. The idea of having something inside of you that can create life, men can never obtain that." This sense of maternalism informs more than just Refn's creative process. While he describes himself as "a complete egomaniac" and "totally sadistic" at work, by contrast he acknowledges that he feels "masochistic, very dominated" at home. So just how big an influence is Liv, both personally and professionally? "She's everything," he says. "We've been together 20



years, she's the only girlfriend I ever had. I came straight out of my mother into her. I've never known another woman. On this movie, I would never have come up with the idea if I didn't have a beautiful wife. I'm not born beautiful. I'm not handsome. But she is. I've always wondered what it's like to be so lucky. In a way, everything comes back to her."

Physical perfection is a key motif in The Neon Demon. It's what separates Jesse from the other female characters, each of whom obsessively craves the one, intangible thing they can never take from her. Something commonly referred to as 'It'. "You can't put your finger on it," Refn elaborates, "you can't define it, you can't imitate it. That's what having 'It' means." Not everyone has 'It', but Elle Fanning does. In order to tell this inverted fairy tale of virginity and the city, Refn recalls being faced with two options when it came to casting Jesse: "Either it was going to be an unknown actress or it was going to be Elle Fanning. I hadn't seen a lot of the films she had been in but Liv had seen one of her more recent ones and said she was terrific. She's very fascinating to look at. She read a draft script and we met and talked a little bit about it. She was the only one I wanted so I asked her very nicely and luckily she said yes."

But landing the perfect lead wasn't enough. Refn knew that if the film was ever going to work, it needed a female touch. So he turned to cinematographer Natasha Braier (XXY, The Rover), who he hails a "revelation" for her attention to detail and eve for framing, and hired a pair of rookie screenwriters. "There's a big difference between men writing women and women writing women," he explains. "I wanted to bring in two playwrights to help me with the female dialogue. First I went to England and hired Polly Stenham, who's a great writer and a lovely woman. I worked with her for a couple of months, but it I think the internet is the best invention since women, but it's a corruptive force also. We live in a very sexualised society. Men want to sexualise youth, women want to consume it."

wasn't complete yet. So I moved on and went to the US where I hired an unknown playwright out of Yale called Mary Laws. Both were instrumental in realising the female characters. I would say, for example, 'This bathroom scene, how would girls talk here?' and Mary would go away and write a few variations of how girls would talk and I would take what I liked and edit it from there. That's why I didn't want screenwriters - it had to be playwrights, people who could really write characters. The last thing I wanted to do was make a movie about how men see women."

On a subconscious level, The Neon Demon deals with male inferiority, the anxiety and fear that stem from a fundamental lack of understanding about female sexuality. At the same time as the film entered pre-production, Refn began editing a coffee table book comprising his personal collection exploitation movie of vintage posters. 'The Act of Seeing' is a treasure chest of trash, crammed with titillating graphic teasers for obscure cult erotica such as Revenge of the Virgins, Valley of the Nymphs and Aqua Sex. Refn says that putting the book together provided as a vital

source of inspiration. "Every time I was creatively stuck I would go back and look through it. It's both a book about putting women on pedestals for the purposes of worship and also degrading, molesting and mutilating them." In past interviews Refn has revealed that his films always start out with a single image, something that arouses and excites him. Only God Forgives was of a man looking down at his hands and very slowly balling them into fists. Bronson and Drive are rooted in something darker. The seed for The Neon Demon? A young girl draped across a casting couch, drenched in her own blood. This grisly image, which feels plucked straight out of 'The Act of Seeing', sets up the film as a scathing satire of the fashion industry. But more than this, The Neon Demon is a comment on the commoditisation of beauty and how our consumer oriented culture feeds on youth and purity ("real 'Lolita' shit," as Keanu Reeves' seedy motel manager puts it).

"I'm very interested in this idea of how we value beauty," says Refn. "You look back through the history of mythology and it's always, 'She was so beautiful that wars were fought,' 'He was so strong that he took down entire armies with his bare hands.' Now beauty has surpassed strength as the ultimate social currency. It's always been a rising stock, it's never gone down, but now with the digital revolution it's reached an unsustainable level. I think the internet is the best invention since women, but it's a corruptive force also. We live in a very sexualised society. Men want to sexualise youth, women want to consume it. If you're 25 you're not 17, but what happens when you're 17 and you're not 14? It's going in that direction whether we like it or not. It's scary, especially when you have two young girls who are starting to experience the world. In Denmark we have a very open attitude towards sex and sexuality. We teach sex. But when we were in LA doing the movie, you could see that a lot of the parents were very morally protective of their children because of what they're exposed to. It was a real eye opener."

birth. He's talked about mentioned menstruation revealed how women are the centre of his world. He's critiqued modern society's shallow compulsion, and made a film that subverts the male gaze. So, is Nicolas Winding Refn a feminist? "I know there's a lot of talk about gender equality - I actually believe that if more women were in power the world would be a better place - but it's still all about whether you're thin enough, tall enough, more beautiful than the next girl, do you have high cheekbones? Every year there's always a big debate in the media because young girls aren't being exposed to the right kinds of role models, but nothing really changes. It's like we're washing our conscience, but then as soon as we feel good about ourselves the wolves start circling again. We all say it's what inside that counts, and we all want to mean that, but life doesn't work like that. There's the way we know we should behave and what we define as good common sense, and then there's human instinct which is terrifying. Like, I'm surrounded by so much beauty, and I'm very envious not to be a part of that. But I'm extremely fortunate because I have very beautiful children. It fucks with your brain to even think like that and it's the worst thing to say as a parent, to even utter those words, but believe me, it goes through everyone's minds. Women's lives are so much more complex though. Guys have it so much easier. It must be so crazy being a woman."

EXCLUSIVE!

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A History of Violence

Join LWLies on a spoilerific journey through Nicolas Winding Refn's most violentest moments.

Pusher

1996

Location: The mean streets of Copenhagen.

Main character: Hapless small-time drug
peddler, Frank (Kim Bodina).

Most violent scene: Man (Frank) walks into a bar and... pulverises ex-associate Tonny's head with an aluminium baseball bat, redecorating the room in claret.

Gore rating: Mild for Frank, but you should see the other guy.

Bleeder

1999

Location: Gritty suburb of Copenhagen.

Main character: Father-to-be.

with a furious temperament, Leo
(Kim Bodnia).

Most violent scene: Leo shoots girlfriend Louise in the stomach with recently acquired gun. He then blows his hand apart with said weapon and trickles his HIV-infected blood on her face and gaping stomach wound.

Gore rating: Harsh and unrelenting. Both parties are dealt a fatal blow.

Fear X

2003

<u>Location:</u> The cold, austere city of Winnipeg, Canada

Main character: Harry (John Turturro), security guard by day and leading investigator in his own wife's murder by night. Most violent scene: Recovered CCTV tape show's Harry's wife being shot by an

unknown assailant.

Gore rating: Very mild. Grainy surveillance footage of murder is eerily unsettling, though.

With Blood on My Hands: Pusher II

2004

<u>Location:</u> The criminally infested streets of Copenhagen... again.

<u>Main character:</u> Recently released jailbird and low-level drug dealer Tonny (Mads Mikkelsen).

Most violent scene: Tonny repeatedly stabs his father with a screwdriver in the side of his abdomen.

WORDS BY Adam Chapman

Gore rating: Moderate. Tonny's father's pristine white shirt bears the brunt of the bloody attack.

I'm the Angel of Death: Pusher III

2005

<u>Location:</u> The criminal underbelly of (you guessed it) Copenhagen

<u>Main character:</u> Notorious drug baron Milo (Zlatko Buri)

Most violent scene: Milo and Radovan (Slavko Labovic) dispose of two dead bodies by hanging them upside down and then disembowelling them into a bucket.

Gore rating: Extreme. Blood pours profusely.

Bronson

2008

<u>Location:</u> A max security prison colourfully reimagined inside the warped and whimsical mind of an inmate.

Main character: Britain's most infamous convict, Charles Bronson (Tom Hardy).

Most violent scene: Bronson takes on a small unit of police officers in a cage fight. Although becoming increasingly bloodied and battered, the one-man machine defiantly refuses to back down.

<u>Gore rating:</u> Moderate. Although bloodsoaked, all body parts remain intact.

Agatha Christie's Marple: Nemesis

2009

<u>Location:</u> "The heart of the English countryside"

Main character: Murder mystery solving bloodhound, Jane Marple (Geraldine McEwan)

Most violent scene: Sister Clotilde (Amanda Burton) offers herself up as a sacrifice to God by impaling herself with a sword she takes off a statue resembling Mary, mother of Jesus.

Gore rating: Extremely mild, tea-time TV drama friendly fare. However, the religious iconography and sinful suicide lends some gravitas.

Valhalla Rising

2009

<u>Location:</u> An unknown, ominous land circa 1000 AD.

<u>Main character:</u> A one-eyed Norse warrior (Mads Mikkelsen).

Most violent scene: Although peppered with violent outbursts, one sequence sees the one-eyed Norse warrior tie a man to a rock and rip out his intestines, singling it out as the film's most sadistic execution.

Gore rating: Extreme. The blood squirts and the intestines squelch, leaving you

Drive

2011

comfortably nauseated.

<u>Location:</u> The neo-noir city of Los Angeles <u>Main character:</u> A slick stunt man and getaway driver (Ryan Gosling) who often likes to wear a satin jacket with a scorpion emblazoned on the back.

Most violent scene: Holed up in a motel, a hitman arrives to take care of Blanche (Christina Hendricks) and the driver. After blowing a sizeable chunk out of the side of Blanche's head with a shotgun, the hitman is stabbed in the neck with a curtain rail by the driver

<u>Gore rating:</u> The splattering of brain and a blood gurgling throat is enough to earn this one an extreme rating.

Only God Forgives

201

<u>Location:</u> The sordid criminal underworld of a neon-hued Bangkok.

Main character: Deeply embroiled drug smuggler, Julian (Ryan Gosling)

Most violent scene: Lieutenant Chang (Vithaya Pansringarm) tortures subordinate Byron (Byron Gibson) by driving two metal chopsticks through his hand and thighs, plunging a knife into his eye sockets, before finishing off by jamming the knife into his ear.

Gore rating: Extreme. Although there are more outwardly graphic displays of violence in the film, the prolonged intensity of the torture and the visceral sensation of pain it evokes make it the most unpleasant

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Nic's Picks #1

The Story of Kraftwerk's 'The Model'

Alongside Manchester's New Order, Kraftwerk are Nicolas Winding Refn's favourite band. LWLies tells the story of one of their most beloved singles.

WORDS BY MATHILDE DUMAZET
ILLUSTRATION BY OLIVER STAFFORD

lip over the vinyl version of Kraftwerk's seminal 1978 album, "The Man-Machine', and easing us into the churning, metronomic nine-minute symphony of 'Neon Lights' is the track which would become the band's most iconic: 'The Model'. To this day the song feels wholly unique, mixing a buoyant lightness in the way the lyrics are delivered with a seedy darkness in its study of the piercing male gaze. But where did 'The Model' come from?

In the early '60s, the first synthesizers were being developed. By 1970, they had blasted through the realms of the experimental, but were still mainly used for sound research rather than composition. In East Germany, Ralph Hütter and Florian Schneider formed the snappily named band Organisation for the Realization of Common Music Concepts, who would later become Kraftwerk. Synthesizers became the core of their innovative, retro-futurist sound.

It took a bit of time for 'The Model' to find its audience. When the song was first released it was eclipsed by other, more avant gardecuts from the album – 'The Robots', 'Spacelab' and 'Metropolis'. These were all songs with a vocal track that is channeled through a vocoder, which became another of the band's sonic trademarks. 'The Model' stands out as it is a more traditional pop song. It has verses, and Ralf Hütter's voice is not robotised. Despite the futuristic tonality of the synthesisers, it is obviously the most marketable song on the album. It is also the only single the band ever released about a human being (though the "model" could refer to a machine). It was 1981 when it belatedly enjoyed its moment of glory and it was re-released with lyrics translated into English as the B-side to 'The Computer Love'. DJs simply preferred 'The Model' to the A-side, and in February 1982, it reached number one in the UK charts, going on to spend 21 weeks in the Top 75.

Hidden behind the simple structure of the song lies a violent message concerning the way men are lured towards superficial beauty. In his 2003 article, 'When Robots Go Mad' in Q magazine, Steve Low says that the members of Kraftwerk were regular customers at local discotheques, and the song was inspired by the, "untouchable models at The Bagel – a local playboy hangout with an Ibizan theme" in Cologne, a city to which they'd often travel when their native Düsseldorf got them down. The article goes on to talk about a soundcheck for a gig in Edinburgh in which the last

line of the song, "I'd like to meet her again" was temporarily altered to, "I'd like to fuck her again."

This was an example of music that criticised modernity while at the same time using all the technological instruments provided by it. With this track they criticise the modelling industry without denying the fact that they, as public figures, play by its rules. Are models simply another form of machine powered by champagne, smile-activated by flash-bulbs, existing in a world where beauty is a consumer product?

In the promo video for 'The Model,' images of 1930s fashion models posing at parties and strutting down catwalks are combined with alternating footage of the band, playing live, still resembling robots. There is an essential innocence to these archive images. When you see them, you imagine big band music playing over the top. To hear this stripped back electronica is both jarring and ironic, emphasising the fact that they are an outfit who look as far into the past as they do to the future.

Kraftwerk have since gone on to influence all kinds of electronic bands. They have long styled themselves as humanoid robots, a look that derived from their love of Fritz Lang's 1927 sci-fi classic, *Metropolis*. There's even a track on 'The Man-Machine' that's a direct homage to the film. You only need to glance at a band like Daft Punk – who also hide themselves behind robot helmets – to see their legacy manifest in modern culture. Their approach covers many artistic disciplines. Painter Emil Schult, who designed much of the band's album artwork, also contributed to the writing of their lyrics. This symbolic universe influenced many multi-faceted artists and bands such as David Bowie, Björk, Depeche Mode, Joy Division, New Order and others like avowed superfan Cliff Martinez, who happens to be the composer behind *Drive*, *Only God Forgives* and *The Neon Demon*.

Nicolas Winding Refin has often cited Kraftwerk as being among his major influences for the *Drive* soundtrack, and as being among his personal favourite bands. Retracing the story of 'The Model' may lead us to *The Neon Demon*, but we might also discover that it's just one of the branches to a tree whose trunk is formed of this monolithic German band. But if you listen to the soundtracks of Refn's films, it's hard not to spot where Kraftwerk have left their distinctive mark







ald this be? Director Nicolas Winding Refn is Denmark's dark lord of cinematic transgression, trading on skin-flailing violence, booming soundtracks and bruised machismo. How could he be making a film with Elle Fanning, a beaming by word for quaint femininity? Their disparate worlds collide in The Neon Demon, a surreal body horror set in the fashion industry in which Fanning stars as an up-an-coming model who is violently victimised by a jealous clique of rivals. She secured her first screen credit at the tender age of three in ean Penn-starring tearjerker, I Am Sam, from 2001, and from then worked consistently across TV and film since. She stole Super 8 from under the snotty noses of its predominantly male pre-teen cast and its celebrity showman director, JJ Abrams, while later offering a supremely compelling presence in Sofia Coppola's Golden Lion-winning Somewhere. Her decision to star in The Neon Demon marks an exciting crossroads in her career - it's perhaps the first time she has truly let go and embraced the darkness.

LWLies: What did you know about Nicolas before signing on to this film? He's rather an interesting character.

Elle Fanning: He is, he is. I was making a movie in South Africa and we were in this tiny village. The TV only had two channels.

So you had news and a movie channel. And the only movie on the movie channel was *Drive*. Since I was little I've had a crush on Ryan Gosling, so I love that movie. It's so... different. That's how I knew Nic. I didn't know anything about him or his personality. They sent me the script of *The Neon Demon* and he said he wanted to meet with me because he was in LA. I read it and was like... 'Woah.' It

was completely unique. After that I saw the documentary made by Liv, his wife, about the shooting of *Only God Forgives*. And seeing that gave quite an insight into him, the man. I mean, he's like a genius beyond.

In what way is he a genius?

Well, when I read the script, it had a beginning and an end. And once we started working, he said that he films in chronological order. I'd never done that before and, honestly, it's the best thing for an actor. The thing that happened yesterday impacts the thing that happens today. It was easier for him to cut scenes and swap things around. While we were shooting, he decided he wanted the film to end differently. One time he just stopped everything and asked: 'How do we want this movie to end?' You trust him so much, that I wasn't even scared about the fact that no-one knew how this film was going to end. It's such a collaboration.

Did that flexibility extend to your dialogue and individual scenes?

He definitely wasn't what you would call strict. He always wanted you to be comfortable. He usually makes films with a lot of guys, and this one is mostly girls. At one point Nic said, 'I don't know anything about fashion,' so he asked all of us girls to pick him up on anything he was getting wrong. Abbey Lee is an actress in the

film who is also a model, so she came in handy. She would tell Nic: 'This is not how it is'. He was very open to learning.

Did you have to learn to walk like a model?

Yes, I did. Abbey is the queen of that. She's a supermodel, she's huge. And so she taught me. There was a cat walk training day. It's amazing how many rules there are for walking.

Do you feel you mastered the walk?

"I would really love to

be a director. Watching

Nicolas work so closely

with the actors - I want

to do that one day."

I think I did. I got the Abbey stamp of approval.

You've recently been doing a lot of fashion shoots for magazines – is the modelling world in reality at all similar to the world of *The Neon Demon*?

Yes and no. In a way this is very fantastical. There are parts of it that seem super heightened. Yet it's very much inspired by the realities of the industry. It's about the time that we live in, but it doesn't have any social media or anything like that in it. It's about obsession with beauty and perfection. There are apps now that retouch and help you fake what you look like. They second guess what society defines as 'pretty'. The movie is also about an obsession with beauty. It covers these subjects in a very heightened way, but it also has a close connection to what's going on in the world.

that in the script?

The film is extremely visual – was all

We had this amazing female DoP, her name is Natasha Braier. She is just amazing. Her and Nic working together was a joy to behold. They just... knew. She was reading the map of his mind. There's never much questioning of that,

because they're instantly working towards that goal. We had screen tests beforehand with all the make-up – there were incredible make-up artists on this film. They came up with all the looks for each big make-up scene, and we tested all of those make-ups in all the different filter lighting they were going to use. So all the prep with the visual side meant that when we jumped into it... boom. Every detail was thought out.

Did Nicolas give you any films to watch?

Yes, I had to watch Russ Meyer's Beyond the Valley of the Dolls. And Valley of the Dolls. I had to watch Suspiria. And Rosemary's Baby was also a reference. I've seen the film described as horror but it's not that. It's something more old school than that. Dario Argento's Suspiria is so freaky, but it's not this super gony film. Nic's favourite film is The Texas Chain Saw Massacre Which I find hilarious...

Is this a film about girls and for girls?

I think this film is very important for girls. It's very smart. There are movies for girls that are similar to this, that are described specifically as horror movies, but they're complex. They don't treat a female audience like they're dumb. They don't spoon feed you. They don't feel the need to explain everything. I think teenage girls will really love this movie. It weats them like they get it.

The wasn't scared about the fact of the this film was going to end."

You play a character who enters into the world of modelling, and finds it to be an extremely lonely and even quite frightening place. Is this a feeling you have ever experienced in life?

Honestly, everyone has those moments. You're with yourself and you just wonder, 'Do I really have anybody?' I was home schooled by my grandma. When I was nine I moved to regular school. When that happened, I technically wasn't alone any more – I was surrounded by people my age. But getting accustomed to that is a very lonesome experience. It was the middle of the school year, too, so I was this new student and I also did movies, so I was an outsider in that sense. You have to learn your way, put yourself out there, learn to navigate. You have to figure out – what's the dynamic here?

Was it like those teen high school movies where you had to do something to prove yourself to everyone, to be truly accepted?

I'm not, like, too shy of a person. So I wasn't afraid to talk.

You have to get noticed. If I would've just stayed in the shadows and been the girl in the corner, things wouldn't have changed for me. The first day was a normal day, then the second day was Halloween. Everyone had to come to school dressed up. I came in as Alice in Wonderland. You walk in this parade, and I was just... oh god! You have to put yourself out there. Everyone walks with their friends, usually in pairs or groups of three. So I had to ask these two girls if I could walk down with them and be the third person in their elique. And they said yes. At least I asked, though. If I hadn't asked, who knows what would've happened?

It must've been tough, because if your costume had been better than than the others, it might have made you a focal point. But if your costume was poor, it could've been seen that you weren't mucking in.

Exactly. So I went with a subdued Alice look. Not too chazy, but you know, good enough. You have to find that balance. With my character in *The Neon Demon*, she may have gone a little overboard, but I think people will have to judge for themse yes.

What was, for you, the toughest day on set?

Maybe it was a mix of two days. There's a scene with Keanu Reeves... It's a very, very shocking moment. There's another scene where my character changes pretty drastically, and it's in this sequence that you really see this in her. I think that was difficult because you're showing a character on screen rather than telling things with dialogue. You need to get that across. Something that Nic does is play music on set, between and during takes. In this scene, there's no dialogue, so he just blasted music at me. It goes with the emotions of the scene. He wants you to get lost in the music. It helps to present that change.

We read a story from when you were making Twixt with Francis Ford Coppola, about how he taught you how to make pasta sauce between the shooting days. Did Nic offer you any similar life lessons?

We were together pretty much every day. I would really love to be a director, and this is something I told him. I turn 18 this year, so symbolically I'll be an adult, so I've been thinking about all

these things I want to do and films I want to make. He has this board where he has these index cards and he writes down every single scene. Each one has a mini synopsis. And he places them all out and numbers them, one, two, three, four... He took me aside one day and showed me his system. And he was asking me about which order the cards should go in. Should this go here? As he was trying to come up with the ending. Watching him work so closely with

the actors, the way he talks to them – I want to do that one day. There's nobody like him.

How long have you wanted to be a director?

It's been a long time. Maybe since I was 13? I wouldn't stop acting or anything...

Was that down to working with someone specific? I did the movie *Ginger and Rosa* with Sally Potter...

Yes. Congratulations on your English accent in that film. It was amazing.

Thank you! I had a dialect coach who helped me out. But this was the first film where I was the main character. I had this English accent, my hair was dyed red... I just didn't feel like myself. There was a lot of rehearsal time on the film. And Sally is very intense. I call her the White Witch. She's a good witch – she has these supernatural psychic powers. We really connected. Seeing her and how she works was just really inspiring.

Do you want to write as well?

Yes, absolutely. I've been writing stories for a long time. When I was nine I got 'Final Draft' on my computer, so I've written little scripts and things. I have the ideas, but the writing itself can be a little tedious. Maybe I'll have to work with somebody?

If you write a script for a feature or a short, and you're happy with it, who would be the person you'd show first to get feedback?

Two of my best friends at school also want to direct. One of them wants to be DoP. One wants to be a director. They've written scripts before, made films and I've been in them. Just student films. I feel like I'd go to them. They've made movies. They've done it. I trust their opinion. Plus they're my age.

Do you find there's a massive difference between making a film in the past or the present?

I guess in a way. I shot a film with Mike Mills called 20th Century Women... he's another one who I loved. Mike is just the coolest. He's all about ad-libbing, which is something I hadn't done much of before. The film set in 1979. I think it's an unconscious thing, but you treat the performance differently. There are certain words or terms that you can't say. You don't have to just be thinking of time, but of place too. The clothes, the hair, the make-up all help to put you in a certain place. But you're still telling a story and trying to build a character.

I also just finished a movie called *Storm in the Stars* where I play Mary Shelley who wrote 'Frankenstein'. I'm speaking with an English accent again. But I was wearing a corset throughout, which was this physical reminder of who I was.

Did you go straight from *The Neon Demon* to Storm in the Stars? That must've been a strange transition.

No, I did three movies in between those two. The weirdest thing is that I went from a film called *About Ray*, where I play a tomboy, to *The Neon Demon*, where I play a super feminine fashionista. That's one of the joys of the job: now you're this, now you're that...

Do you have a favourite movie?

society

"There are apps now

that retouch and help

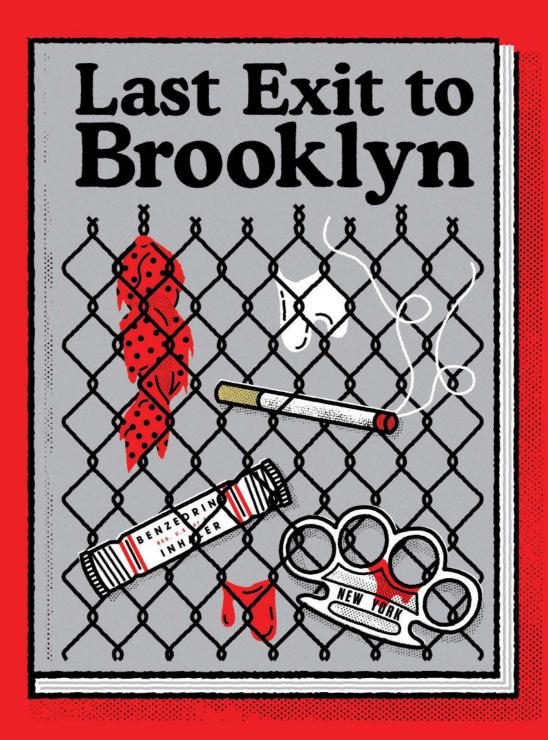
you fake what you

look like. They second

defines as 'pretty'."

guess what

Hmm... I have a lot of favourite movies. The movie that I love the most, the one that made me realise that movies have a certain power beyond entertainment is The Seven Year Itch with Marilyn Monroe. I love Marilyn Monroe. I have her face cream and face power which I bought at auction. When I was seven I dressed up as her character in The Seven Year Itch with the famous flowing white dress. I did the make-up and everything. It was all very fancy. So when you're seven, you're not allowed to be present at an actual auction during the bidding when they're holding up the paddles. But they do let you go to the lot preview the day before. When I went to the preview I dressed up as her. I was walking around pretending I was her and playing with all her stuff. Everyone there was like, 'who the hell is this child?' They probably thought I was hired in. But I was seven! My mom was laughing. But she's the one that let me it made me unafraid to walk into a room and pretend I was somebody else 🚯



Nic's Picks #2

Hubert Selby Jr's 'Last Exit to Brooklyn'

The fetid, back-alley poetry of this transgressive classic keeps Nicolas Winding Refn warm in the winter.

WORDS BY ADAM LEE DAVIES
ILLUSTRATION BY OLIVER STAFFORD

ow many books make you reach for the bottle, your bible and a bucket all at the same time? Leave you with your loins tingling, your hands shaking, an acrid licorice scurf around the back of your tongue? Make you think that heaven may not reside beyond the stars, but way down there, through the hellish, flinty muck that cakes up around your boots? When was the last time you read a book that made you feel like you'd walked through the wrong door in the wrong neighbourhood, grateful just to escape with your life?

Hubert Selby Jr's 1964 debut novel 'Last Exit to Brooklyn' is a desolation row of savagery, ugliness and depravity. It is the end of hope. It is an impoverished jungleland of hip queers, boiling-point pederasts, zoot-suited pimp daddies, neglect, fear and degeneracy, where a brutal gang rape can be described in unflinching Hogarthian detail and not even raise the pulse. 'Last Exit' is a Springsteen song gone wrong – it's looking for the heart of Saturday night and finding it drunk, beaten, sodomised and slumped against a chain-link fence.

Selby was a Brooklyn kid who quit school at 15 to join the Merchant Marines. Aboard ship, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis and sent back to the US where doctors told him he had less than a year to live. Having the lion's share of his ribs and lungs excavated, saddled him with lifelong pulmonary problems. He was prescribed heroin for the pain, which left him battling addiction for years. But Selby defied the odds. He was too sick to live and too ornery to die. He was also too weak to work. Reasoning that he knew the alphabet and that it didn't require any heavy lifting, he tried his hand at writing. Developing an immediate, immersive writing style that was tuned to the staccato flow of Brooklyn life (and had little use for conventional punctuation), Selby began writing the short stories that would evolve into 'Last Exit'.

They are a bleak and bleary clutch of airless, subterranean vignettes that all take place around the cruddy navel of The Greeks: a lower-than-lowlife dive bar frequented by nighthawks, studs, addicts, johns and homos all looking for a violent angle, a shady dollar, or a cheap, skeezy thrill. The Greeks is our box seat for a permanent night of unreason, barbarity and self-negation. From here, we can trot after lovesick transvestite Georgette as she loses herself in a perfumed haze of sexual humiliation and benzedrine. In this world, comedy comes in the form of a knife in the leg, but Georgie's more worried about the rip in her slacks. That's a tragedy, honey. She'll see tall grasses flow and part and hear cellos before the end, but they will only be dreams. The prostitute Tralala needs no such delusions. So sure is she that her beauty will carry her on to fairer shores, she relies on it even as she bloats with age, booze and spite. As she lays broken and naked on the

waste ground behind The Greeks while men line up for their turn on the mound, her friends roar with laughter.

Across the Manhattan Bridge, the Jets and Sharks of hit '50s musical West Side Story were singing that, "Comfort is yours in America," but Selby's royal scumbags don't seem to be living in America. Or New York. Or Brooklyn, for that matter. About this time, and not so very far away, Henry Hill is leaning against a flashy car and joking with Jimmy and Tommy while doo-wop and mama's meatballs waft down the street. They could be a million miles away. This is Red Hook: no-one gets in, no-one gets out and no-one gets fed. Already the setting for HP Lovecraft's 1925 tale of occult mobs, 'The Horror at Red Hook', in which the author describes the place as, "a maze of hybrid squalor," and Harlan Ellison's teen-toughs memoir 'Memos from Purgatory', it would also be home to bloody Brando parable On the Waterfront and the gangbangers of Straight Out of Brooklyn. A sickle of brick-coloured clay curling into the Hudson Bay, Red Hook demands blood.

The inspiration for the book, however, goes far beyond the place and its people. While thumbnail Selby biographies paint him as a late-blooming wunderkind, stitching together his diabolical literary patchwork with nothing but the view from his window and the tracks in his arms to guide him, all that hospital downtime had turned Selby into a voracious reader. The earthy naturalism of Émile Zola is never far away, specifically his 1885 novel 'Germinal' - a clear influence on the story 'Strike', in which a drunken union blowhard pays the butcher's bill for his rampant homosexual awakening (the story would itself later be parodied in an episode of The Simpsons – what a world!). The death, masturbatory ecstasy and tubercular drag queens that stalk Jean Genet's 'Our Lady of the Flowers', from 1943, also likely graced Selby's nightstand. Closer to home were John Rechy's 1959 cruising classic 'City of Night', William S Burroughs' blank, sordid 1953 heroin confessional 'Junkie' and the wasted Bowery cocksmiths of Allen Ginsberg's 1956 poem 'Howl.' Like Selby, they were all published (Kerouac and Genet too) by alternative imprint Grove Press. Like Selby, they were all panning for gold in rivers of shit.

There would be success. There would be the customary obscenity trial to bolster that success. There would be money – a good deal of which would disappear into Selby's veins. There would be a middling film adaptation in 1989 (known in Sweden as *Slutstation Brooklyn*). There would be other novels – most notably 'Requiem for a Dream,' itself adapted into a film in 2000 by Darren Aronofsky. He even co-wrote Refn's screwy 2003 thriller, *Fear X*. But it's fair to say that Selby – who died in 2004 aged 75 – would be defined by 'Last Exit to Brooklyn'







Factory Girl (2006)

Directed by George Hickenlooper

his was supposed to be the film that launched Sienna Miller into the stratosphere. Instead, it courted damning reviews and a couple of lawsuits. It's the story of Edie Sedgwick, the Warhol 'Superstar' who, for an intense period in the mid-'60s, became the focal point for the world's cameras, before fame took its toll and drug addiction sent her to an early grave.

LWLies: Factory Girl is about the life of Warhol 'Superstar' Edie Sedgwick. Was she a model?

Manuela Lazic: She was more of a muse, and the type of work she was doing with Warhol was very experimental. It relied on her muse-ness and her fame.

Elena Lazic: Factory Girl is pretty terrible, but interesting as a film about the 1960s: the era seemed genuinely crazy, with people doing weird things specifically because there were weird things to do. Transcribing that peculiar atmosphere to film always seems incredibly difficult.

Are models and muses often mixed up in cinema?

ML: Not really, although some models (in the '90s especially) were treated like muses as they got more famous. The best example is Kate Moss.

EL: I think Sedgwick was, in that sense, more of a muse than a model. She was mostly in films, she didn't do commercial ads or catwalks, so I wouldn't strictly call her a model.

Factory Girl presents this idea of many small people orbiting a lone sage. Is there any truth to that?

ML: Yes, in some studios you have the designer and his army who are ready to do literally anything for her/him. It's the same for photographers: the really big ones have several assistants

who work hard, doing extremely tedious things, but they're just happy to be there and learning from the best.

EL: In reality that dynamic isn't – generally at least – born out of a total, masochistic devotion to the designer or stylist. It is simply what this crazy, constantly changing world necessitates. Everything someone produces is almost instantly obsolete. They always need to be creating something new.

The moral of the film is: being a model/muse is very bad for your health.

EL: I don't know if it's clear, but in real fashion you get a sense that the model is bringing something on a purely professional level. People like Kate Moss, when she is described as a muse, it's an image thing. In reality she was just working and getting paid.

ML: I don't know if the real Edie was only motivated by fame, but the film really emphasises that. The models who work best nowadays are usually not driven by fame, they're trying to take the job for what it is: posing for pictures and making money. The fame happens sometimes, but it's not really their goal.

EL: According to the film, the Factory gave you just the fame – which is fake, fabricated, a surface effect of real fashion modelling. When a fashion model becomes big, it's not really because she's better than the others, but because important people in the industry have decided that she should be the most important model now. I guess this idea that one woman could be the most beautiful woman of the moment is invented to drive sales – they're selling you the dream of being globally recognised and adored for your beauty. In reality taste is relative, and no woman is the most beautiful in the world. Warhol was only interested in that phenomenon, in that effect. After you've worked as a model you quickly learn that the sense of superiority you can sometimes get aren't real and don't define you.



Directed by Michael Cristofer

efore her move into the director's chair and headlining action spectaculars such as *Tomb Raider*, *Wanted* and *Salt*, Angelina Jolie was out to show the world she was an serious actor. This HBO TV movie offers a biography of the woman thought to be the first supermodel, Gia Carangi, whose reliance on hard drugs also meant that she was also one of the first public figures to succumb to AIDS.

LWLies: Gia offers a more compelling and – if feels – more credible version of the story told in Factory Girl. Is that the case?

ML: Gia is really impressive in its accuracy.

EL: There's a bit where she says, 'The only thing you have to remember is that it's not about you. It's not you they're looking at... I'm on top of that. I understand that. If you let it be about you, then you're screwed. So... you have to stay separate from what's happening, you have to be somewhere else.' I wrote it all down because it's perfect.

ML: She wanted money, and people told her she could be a model, so she tried it. At first it wasn't too hard. It was fun. But, eventually, she realised that she was becoming famous for something she was not: she didn't want to be a muse, she had a real personality and the fame made her feel lonely. Obviously I've never reached her level of fame, but the feeling of being seen as what you are not is there sometimes. People really think that telling you you are beautiful is all you need to hear, and although it's nice, it becomes frustrating because you can't complain about it. You also want to be seen as more than a pretty face.

EL: I think *Gia* is an amazing movie because it gets that right, and she got that right. Instead of her downfall being linked to her not being successful anymore (like Sedgwick when Warhol lost

interest in her), it was because she could not reconcile that fame, power, money and adulation with who she was.

What about that idea of having to play a role?

EL: Yes, I think if you want to survive and not go crazy, you have to realise that it's not about you. I don't think I could do modelling full time because I could not feel fine about having only that, about the only goal being money. I could look further ahead to what I would do with that money in the future, but I'm just too impatient for that. Kudos to the models who deal with that.

ML: The problem with this job is that it does not define you, even thought it's all you do and it's through this job that people see you and your success. It took me a while to really see it as just a job and not something that had to define me. I think that's because modelling and fame are inextricably linked. For many, fame is the ultimate goal, so they assume you should be happy with just that.

Do you ever see Gia-like, hyper volatile types who seem like they're on the road to ruin?

EL: There are a few Gia-like models, I guess, but I usually feel like it's because they're just starting out. There are many, many more models who are perfectly level headed, hyper professional, and who have interesting lives going for them. It's quite fascinating actually.

ML: I honestly think that Gia's approach to the job was at first the best one to have: she really didn't take it seriously. Problems started for her when she wanted more and people weren't able to understand that. So she reached for drugs. I don't think her being volatile was the main reason for her demise, which makes this a very tragic story.

Exhibit C:

The Bitter Tears of Petra Von Kant (1972)

Directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder

erman New Wave lynchpin, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, parlays the fraught egos of the fashion industry into an intense three-hander in which the power and influence of a diva-ish fashion designer starts to crumble.

ML: This film uses the framework of fashion to talk about romantic relationships, but it also has some interesting things to say about the industry itself.

EL: This might sound pedantic, but I kept thinking that Fassbinder was probably in his thirties when he made this film, and the things he says about relationships feel quite basic to me. I kept thinking about how we salute men for understanding relationships, and it makes me mad! Anyway, that's a bit unrelated. In more publishable words, I could see where everything was going really clearly... It did not surprise me in any way.

ML: It presented the stereotype (that is sometimes real!) of the big-headed, arrogant designer. Petra has her assistant do everything for her, even down to drawing her designs. She uses her for entertainment too. I'm not saying that they're all like that, on the contrary. But it did make me think of some designers who use their assistants not just for work, but also to get empty compliments on their look of the day, the designs they've created... It sometimes gets ridiculous.

The film seems to say that those diva types will get their comeuppance in the end.

ML: The reality is different. They will not get "punished" since they cater to the dreams of so many people. They represent the ultimate complete person for some, because they love themselves and use others who are happy to be used.

EL: The film is interesting in the way it portrays a certain circle of violence, where everyone is ultimately offended by someone else and no one loves each other. It seems pretty nihilistic and pessimistic, but the logic of the film works.

ML: Petra is happy with her work, it's her sentimental life that's a mess. But people don't care about that, even her friends are just saying, 'But you're Petra von Kant! You should be happy, you're successful!'

The only interesting stories are the ones where private emotion overlaps with public work.

ML: Ah yes, and that's unfortunate, because I think the job in itself can be quite fascinating. It's a lot of work for everyone involved, and that should be enough.



Exhibit D:

Portfolio (1983)

Directed by Robert Guralnick

his glossy documentary offers an idealised vision of life within the cut-throat modelling industry. Julie Wolfe, playing herself, is fresh off the bus before starting work at Elite Models, jetting around the world and experiencing the glamour, amusement and mild anxiety that comes from being a supermodel.

In Portfolio, the makers are attempting to show the industry as being fun and enriching, but it actually comes across as an outsider as being quite dull.

EL: That might be because being a model is incredibly boring. **ML:** Ahahaha. come on?!

EL: It is!

ML: *Portfolio* is strange because it was produced by John Casablancas, the founder of Elite (and the father of Julian Casablancas of The Strokes), so it presents a very positive image of the industry. Yet at the same time it is pretty accurate.

EL: It shows modelling as work. Boring work, where you're just standing there looking nice, or difficult work, where you have to repeat the same thing over and over, look happy, etc. It's work.

ML: But the models in the film understand that, so they just try to make time pass by chatting and being nice to one another. At one point, I was surprised that the director had kept in a scene where a model is shooting some lingerie outside and she says to the stylist, 'What the hell am I wearing?!' and then laughs. They don't take it too seriously, and that's how the biggest models roll.

How typical was the heroine of *Portfolio?* She seems to represent the Hollywood dream chaser ideal?

ML: It may seem a bit too American-dream like, but for many models, that's how it happens. You come from a small town where one person who seems to know about this industry tells you you have a chance to become a great model. You try it, you don't know whether it's a good idea, or if it will work, then you see that it's just a job. The main character is very down to earth, but the problem with girls when they start out is that sometimes they get ideas. They think they're going to become actual princesses, and that can make for a lot of disappointment.

Portfolio is the only film that presents modelling as pure, unalloyed fun.

EL: Lacking from this film is the sense of emptiness and sometimes loneliness you get, which is very much present in *Gia*.

ML: Yes, *Portfolio* makes it look like really fun work. And it says at some point, 'all models are nice!' which is obviously not true.



Model (1980)

Directed by Frederick Wiseman

amed documentary director Frederick Wiseman trains his camera on the early-'80s modelling industry, not just the shoots, but the banal admin and organisation that leads to every magazine cover and catwalk event.

What were your thoughts on Wiseman's Model?

EL: I have been wondering if the film is boring, or if it's modelling that's boring. I mean, is it boring because I already know what it's like, or is it boring because modelling is boring? He is trying to emphasise the boredom with long takes, awkward pauses, the moments between the 'action', etc... I liked it a lot for showing the modelling world as it is. I watched it with a friend and he told me that modelling looked horrific, and that's a pretty understandable response.

The best Wiseman films (and the most interesting ones) are about people talking. Is there much talk?

ML: No, usually the photographer begins by giving you guidelines, and if you're a bit experienced you get what type of poses he wants and then he doesn't need to tell you anything.

That's why they often play loud music in the studio.

EL: The models in this film barely talk, but there's a sequence where a male model has a shower and, for some reason is talking about how he feels about it all – I wish there would have been more of that. But at the same time, in reality, as a model, you don't get to talk, and your experience of modelling is the same as the one portrayed in the film, and as that of someone watching that film.

How have things changed since Model/Portfolio?

EL: Models seemed to work so hard in the past. At some point, an agent asks a model if she'd be okay with jumping on a trampoline – that's crazy!

ML: In *Portfolio* there's an Issey Miyake show where, typically, two girls are laughing a lot because they don't know how to wear these clothes. That still happens and it's the best.

EL: I think from the films we've seen, the biggest difference between now and then is the models: in the '90s they all had a strong personality. I'm not sure that's still true. Maybe for top models, I guess.

Exhibit F:

Prêt-à-Porter (1994)

Directed by Robert Altman

quaintmurdermysteryisplaced at the centre of Paris Fashion Weekin Robert Altman's sprawling ensemble dramain which many models and designers play thinly-veiled versions of themselves. Hollywood A-listers mingle with the great and good of the '90s fashion cognoscenti.

Prêt-à-Porter seems to exemplify the modelling industry in the '90s.

ML: It's so '90s it hurts. It's interesting how it uses real designers and real collections but takes them seriously, although most of them are atrocious! But that was the '90s I guess...

EL: *Prêt-à-Porter* was great for showing the mood at a *haute couture* show in Paris. I did a show for Jean-Paul Gaultier once, and it was just like that: people running around, models not caring at all but being super relaxed and having a glass of Champagne before going on the catwalk... it was crazy.

ML: It really hasn't changed in these terms

The film has an overwhelmingly negative view of journalists.

ML: Kim Basinger was perfect in that role of a TV reporter. There really are journalists a bit like her backstage, always on the lookout for famous models or designers to say something to the camera, even banalities.

EL: With the fashion journalist running around versus the fabulousness of the show, you get the sense of that craziness, where the craziness is essential for the mood. If it wasn't there, that fabulous craziness, it would be boring.

ML: My favourites are photographer-journalists, the ones who shoot street style, they have no idea who you are but they're very nice. Actual journalists don't ask very interesting questions, they just want to know what you think of the collection. This film was great for showing the diversity of fashion shows too. The Issey Miyake one was an actual performance (his shows always are) but others were just straightforward walking.



Exhibit G:

Zoolander (2001)

Directed by Ben Stiller

oncerning the exploits of dim-brained male supermodel Derek Zoolander (Ben Stiller), who is being psychically coerced by Will Ferrell's fashion mogul Mugatu into assassinating the the Prime Minister of Malaysia. All he wants to do is open The Derek Zoolander Centre For Kids Who Can't Read Good And Wanna Learn To Do Other Stuff Good Too.

One of you mentioned that Zoolander was the most truthful portrait of modelling you know.

EL: I like how it shows models who live together and how they're sometimes detached from reality.

ML: Yes! That is never really shown: models often live all together – sometimes eight people in one house – and it's pretty awful.

Can models really be that stupid?

EL: You know the scene where they all die at the gas station? Well, sometimes models do seem to forget the basic principles of survival. I'm not kidding. It's quite astonishing and depressing. But that's far from being the majority of models, in my experience.

Zoolander has this 'look' called Blue Steel which is a trademarked. Is this based on reality?

ML: I think we all have our look but we don't give them names. And we don't really think about it. It comes naturally.

EL: It's like an exaggeration of something that is certainly rehearsed over the shoots. You get a sense of how you look best. To give it a name is one step further and makes it fall into ridicule. It's a pretty clever joke as it does hint at some truth.

Do you think Zoolander might have made more people do this?

ML: The best shoots are those where you are asked to do poses you've never done before. I had a shoot like that recently and was surprised by how quickly I got used to the attitude. I think with time you don't develop looks as much as an ability to adapt.

There's a scene in Gia where the photographer says, 'pretend you're fucking!'

ML: That definitely must happen (Terry Richardson, I bet) but I would not be comfortable with that. Photographers need you to be comfortable first, then as you get in the groove of the shoot they might use weird words, but never that intense.

EL: They don't use words like that, but everyone understands that this is what they want us to look like.

In Summation

EL: I think *Gia* was my favourite. It was more of an individual story, and it didn't pretend to be representative of modelling as a whole.

ML: I loved *Gia*, although it shouldn't be taken as a definitive template for what modelling is all about. My least favourite was *Prêt-à-Porter*, it didn't have that much to say, although it was fun to see '90s fashion.

EL: *Gia* should be more well known. Jolie is incredible. **ML:** She's always underrated as an actress because she's so beautiful, and that made her perfect for this role.

EL: As a model, you're so much on your own, and so much relies on one decisive job, on being at the right place at the right moment, no one can say to have exactly the same experience. *Gia* got that right.









Nic's Picks #3

Alejandro Jodorowsky

A whistle-stop tour of the extremely weird but very wonderful world of Alejandro Jodorowsky.

WORDS BY ANTON BITEL
ILLUSTRATION BY OLIVER STAFFORD

n seven avant-garde directorial features spread across five decades, Chilean-born Alejandro Jodorowsky has, in his own inimitable way, dealt with the ordeals of life, the paths of reality and the masks of identity. His cinema is overdetermined, unruly, maximalist - a heady kaleidoscope of metaphysical questing, exaggerated archetypes and psychedelic imagery. He is the kind of filmmaker who attracts not-always-helpful labels like 'visionary', 'genius', 'provocateur' and – of course – 'pretentious'. Feeling lost before you've even started? Take heed of our handy guide...

- Mime -

In 1947, aged just 19, college dropout Jodorowsky established his own performance company called Teatro Mimico in Santiago. He later moved to Paris where he studied mime under maestro Étienne Decroux. In Louis Mouchet's 1994 documentary *The Constellation Jodorowsky*, Marcel Marceau describes being both shocked and moved by the "excess of violence" in the mime routines that Jodorowsky had created for him around this time, routines with names like 'The Cage' and 'The Mask Maker'.

Jodorowsky's very first film, the 1957 short *La Cravate*, was a wordless mime for camera – and scenes of mime performance, or mute characters, have subsequently appeared not just in his first features, 1968's *Fando y Lis* and 1970's *El Topo*, but also in later films like 1989's *Santa Sangre* and 1990's *The Rainbow Thief*.

- Buñuel, panic and riot -

In Paris in 1962, inspired by filmmaker Luis Buñuel and Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty from the 1930s, Fernando Arrabal, Roland Topor and Jodorowsky (all three future filmmakers) co-founded The Panic Movement, a collective devoted to absurdist performance art and the 'explosion of reason'. Jodorowsky's feature debut *Fando y Lis*, which concerns a couple who get lost in their search for a post-apocalyptic paradise, was in fact based on Jodorowsky's imperfect memory of an Arrabal play written for the movement.

The film's taboo-busting content – paedophilia, sacrilege, matricide, cannibalism - led to a riotous reception at its Acapulco première, forcing Jodorowsky to flee the screening and hide in the bottom of a car. Here, too, Jodorowsky was continuing a tradition in avant-garde filmmaking inherited from Buñuel – after all, Buñuel's early collaborations with Salvador Dalí, 1928's *Un Chien Andalou* and 1930's *L'Âge d'Or*, both sparked public rioting.

- Federico Fellini -

As a tribute to his favourite filmmaker Federico Fellini, Jodorowsky gave Lis the short cropped hair-do and doe eyed demeanour of the Italian maestro's wife and muse, Giulietta Masina. Fellini returned the compliment with allusions to Fando y Lis in films such as 1969's Satyricon and 1980's City of Women. More generally, the carnivalesque spirit of Fellini infuses Jodorowsky's films, which are populated with big mamas and mamas' boys, dwarves and giants, cripples and mendicants, dealers and thieves, cross-dressers and whores, gunmen and gurus. Santa Sangre and The Rainbow Thief even feature that most Fellini-esque of settings: the circus.

- The Underground and the Midnight Movie -

Jodorowsky advertised his status as underground filmmaker by casting himself as the eponymous lead in *El Topo*, or 'the Mole', a creature that spends most of its time beneath the earth's surface. In the film's second half, Jodorowsky's gun-slinging antihero finds himself living with cave dwellers beneath a mountain, where he has a spiritual awakening. Similarly, Meleagre (Peter O'Toole), the eccentric protagonist of Jodorowsky's now disowned *The Rainbow Thief*, retreats from the material wealth of an inheritance to a subterranean life in the city's sewers.

Screening exclusively in the late-late slot at New York's Elgin Theatre with little fanfare, *El Topo* would, through word of mouth alone, attract a devoted, repeat audience of disaffected, countercultural potheads – and so the 'Midnight Movie' was born. The niche success of *El Topo*, and the vocal support of John Lennon and Yoko One, would gain Jodorowsky a million dollar budget for his next cosmic experiment in cinema, *The Holy Mountain*. It would prove to be his masterwork and, along with David Lynch's 1977 film *Eraserhead*, the weirdest and wildest film on the by-then flourishing Midnight circuit.

- Genre -

El Topo may be a skewed take on the western, but it guns down all normal notions of the genre, and of Western civilisation. Similarly, when producer Claudio (brother of Dario) Argento hired Jodorowsky to "make a picture where a man kills a lot of women," Jodorowsky took the skeletal frame of a conventional slasher feature, and fleshed it out with all his usual political, theosophical and psychological preoccupations. The resulting film, Santa Sangre, is as much mystic 'trip' as bloody giallo, with a mother-loving serial killer who is also Jesus on a journey of self-discovery.



- Tarot and Tusk(s) -

Jodorowsky has long been a student and practitioner of tarot, and the cards find their way into the weft of his films' narratives, whether scattered around the Thief/Fool (Horacio Salinas) when we first meet him in *The Holy Mountain*, or used as calling cards by Meleagre in *The Rainbow Thief*. The associated symbolism of this mystic deck pervades all his films.

The director also likes elephants. His *Tusk*, from 1980, follows the parallel *rites de passage* in India of a colonial Englishman's daughter and a young male pachyderm, both on the hunt for freedom. Something even more essential (and horrifying) about the complex relationship between human and beast is captured in *Santa Sangre*'s extraordinary elephant funeral sequence, where a grieving entourage of circus members and brass band ceremoniously escort the dead creature's giant coffin to a clifftop, only to dump it over the edge for the poor and the desperate below to hack at its flesh for food.

- Psychogenealogy -

Jodorowsky regularly writes and lectures on psychogenealogy, a therapeutic system which holds that the traumas informing our personality are products of our family tree, often going back many generations. The influence of these ideas can also be felt in his films, where he often casts himself alongside his sons, even reversing their roles.

In *El Topo*, the character played by Jodorowsky abandons his son (played by Jodorowsky's actual son, Brontis) as a boy, and years later must confront him as an adult. In *Santa Sangre* two more of Jodorowsky's sons, Axel and Adan, play the spiritually confused Fenix (at different ages) as he struggles to liberate himself from the hold that his late father and mother have on his psyche. (*Fando y Lis* shares

this theme of familial entrapment stretching beyond the grave). In *The Dance of Reality*, Brontis plays Jodorowsky's father Jaime, while Jodorowsky's mother Sara believes that her 'Alejandrito' is the reincarnation of her own father – and Jodorowsky cameos as his older self. All this is psychogenealogical theory presented in vivid dramatic form, with Jodorowsky himself figuring all at once as filmmaker, family man and patient on the couch.

- The Cinema of Pure Ideas -

This is a euphemism for Jodorowsky's unmade films. As documented in Frank Pavich's 2013 documentary, *Jodorowsky's Dune*, in the mid'70s Jodorowsky undertook extensive pre-production on an adaptation of Frank Herbert's SF novel, only for its sprawling overambition (an unlikely 14-hour duration was planned) to send investors packing. Jodorowsky's designs still influenced everything from *Star Wars* to *Alien* to *The Terminator* – and much of his conceptual work with the French artist Moebius would eventually find its way into their collaborative comicbook series, 'Incal and Metabarons'.

In the '90s and '00s, Jodorowsky tried – and failed – to secure funding for two projects: an *El Topo* sequel called *Abel Cain*; and a gambling/gangster flick named *King Shot*. In 2013, however, he managed, with help from private sponsors and crowdfunding, to make his abstract childhood autobiopic *The Dance of Reality* – and its follow-up, *Endless Poetry*.

- Nicolas Winding Refn -

Refn's previous two features, 2011's *Drive* and 2013's *Only God Forgives*, were dedicated to Jodorowsky. So should you be. There is nothing else 'out there' quite like the delirious phantasmagoria that he has crafted in cinema

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Jeff Goldblum

Independence Day: Resurgence sees Jeff Goldblum return as Earth's lone voice of interplanetary reason. We spoke to him about the difference between connection with aliens and humans.

eff Goldblum is a character comedian and a cerebral sex symbol. At 6'4" and with matchstick limbs, he is like an elegant Basil Fawlty, or a charismatic preying mantis. He is also an infamous flirt. At a press junket for Jurassic Park, he literally charmed the shoes off broadsheet journalist, Sabine Durrant. Now, aged 63, his powers remain. He has a way of wrapping his mind around ideas, expressing nuances of opinion before winding down with a purring chuckle. It makes you happily helpless when he offers the stroke of a respectful compliment. It's inevitable that the conversation turns towards intimate matters, such as having close relationships and how acting can displace the urge to play away. At least to begin with, we have connected to discuss Roland Emmerich's Independence Day: Resurgence - the first sequel the director has ever put his name to.

Goldblum reprises the role that he first played 20 years ago in Independence Day, that of ex-scientist, David Levinson. This time around, when the aliens approach, there is no Will Smith to offer a gung-ho helping hand, but instead a new support cast of patriotic upstarts that includes Maika Monroe, Liam Hemsworth and Charlotte Gainsbourg. Rising from the wreckage and brushing themselves down, the denizens of Earth have wisely chosen to sink some time and resource into making sure they're prepared were this to ever happen again. They have been taking advantage of the alien technology that they laid to waste in '96. Yet, the aliens, too, have been prepping for another skirmish - can the planet survive the same shit twice?

LWLies: Independence Day: Resurgence sees you reprising your role from the original film, where you were the only one who knew that were are not alone in the universe. Is that something you believe? Goldblum: You know I'm an actor? I'm not the best person to ask. I'm interested in the question, and I look to the scientists and the Neil deGrasse Tysons and Carl Sagans of the world. I followed them a little bit through the years. Recently, I googled the head of SETI (Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence), which is the organisation that listens for... them. They say we've never been contacted but - the conventional wisdom is because of the size of the universe there's a likelihood that there are other kinds of life out there. Recently, I read something by this guy who heads up SETI who said that because of our extended reach and listening reception, he predicts that in the next 20 years, we might be in contact with somebody. What do you think

Would you like that? It's not something that I'm obsessed with, or wake up every day thinking, 'Gee, here's what I'm missing from my day. I wish I could talk to somebody who lives on another planet or in another galaxy.' But I'm sure that would be a landmark event in the human species and would be absolutely fascinating and would inspire a million questions and hopefully a growth spurt of some kind. All these questions of: what is the universe? Who are we? Where are we? What's our relationship to the universe? That would be really something. Of course, here on this planet, it would be nice to make contact with all kinds of people, and be in healthy and

intimate but fully effective communication and communion with all other human species, not to mention all the other forms of life on our planet. We've got a long way to go before we contact all of them, right?

So you don't wake up wishing for alien contact, but what do you wake up wishing for? Well, I just had my first child - me and my wife, Emilie. Generously, this lovely production gave me a week in the schedule. I made my way from Albuquerque, where we were shooting, back to LA, and it happened on the 4th of July that Charlie Ocean Goldblum was born. How about that? So, in the morning, I love to wake up and see him and maybe help feed him and change his diaper and spend the day with him and give him a bath later that night. All three of us get in a big bathtub - that couldn't be more fun, we sing to him and hear him sing and watch him play. When I'm not working I play in a jazz group called the Mildred Snitzer Orchestra. If you're ever in Los Angeles, please come to Rockwell, where we currently have a residency. We play every Wednesday night. So I look forward to - not only practising and playing my piano and singing every day at home, but then getting together once a week and playing with those guys.

Does this mean that acting is down the list of priorities? No, I love acting. I'm working on something now that I'm not supposed to talk about. I did another little thing with Wes Anderson that I loved working on. I like working on acting every day. I did a couple of shows. I don't know if they came out in the UK. I did



something on *Portlandia*. I enjoyed that and I just did an episode of *The Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*, the Tina Fey show, that I liked doing. I have a very good time acting these days.

How do you stay balanced with so much on the go? I don't know. Let me see. Well, I'm just lucky that I've got several areas of passionate interest and involvement. I don't know. Ha ha ha ha. Ha ha ha ha. I'm just lucky, but balance is one of the things that I aspire to. Sometimes, I'm not so balanced but I try everyday to do something that exercises my human kind of balance.

Any tips? I'd have to get to know you first of all. I'm not so much an advisor and more a humble student than anything. I'd have to know you personally and know your balance challenges before I could weigh in. I might have an idea or two. Let me see, let me see. Hmmm. Wear a scarf. Watch out for your neck getting chilled and... what else? Portion control.

That's a really good one. Thank you. I have to do it myself because if I open a bag of popcorn, for instance, jeez, it's hard not to eat that whole damn bag. I have to just exercise a little discipline and go, 'Well, just a little bit of this now will be fine and dandy.'

You said that you'd have to know me to give me tips. How well can we know anyone? When you've got someone you're interested in or all the people that you have different relationships with – whether you work with them or are married to them – it's a daily challenge and opportunity and adventure to

contact them. How well? I'm sure there are always infinite ways you could go. There's probably no finish line or peak on that mountain, but you can always attempt to look in their eyes more deeply, open yourself up more fully and get more specifically interested in them and take a journey.

Are there dangers in that? Are there dangers in that? Well, I think the greater danger is to not go on the journey, to avoid that. Therein lies the real danger. It can be messy. It can be upsetting. It can be frightening, but I think your connection with other people is certainly one of the ways in which you can maximise this delicious and mysterious opportunity of being here. Don't you agree?

I'm thinking about how there are more interesting people than we will ever be able to know, and it's a possibility that in getting to know one person well, you might endanger what you have with a person you already know. Ohh, wait a minute, I think you're talking about... I think I heard a lot of that. I think I get the gist of it, ha ha ha. If you have this arrangement with one person, relationshipwise, you mean getting to know another person too well could violate that, betray that other relationship?

Correct. Oh, that's what you're talking about. Well, now, this is a more meat and potatoes, y'know, issue. Sure. But that's case-by-case and it's a very personal thing, isn't it? Why, are you involved in some dilemma like this yourself?

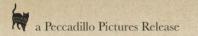
No, I just like thought experiments. Thought experiments! Yes, yes. Yes, yes. Well, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yes, so you have to keep your wits about you, probably, and be discriminating and discreet while you're going on this headlong adventure. You can be childlike without being childish. You can be freewheeling and free and in full possession of your play without losing your sense of adult discipline. What do you think of that?

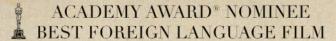
Yes. Also, imagination. You can imagine anything as long as you don't do it. Well, acting is this chosen field of mine. It has something to do with imagination and it can satisfy you, yes. You can live things out in your imagination and have some kind of satisfaction without actually doing them. I think that's true. In my experience, that's right. That's right.

Would you recommend acting to your son as a job? I would share my passion for it and the fun that I've had and the challenges of it and the pitfalls of it, but I would be much more interested in seeing and learning what he's interested in naturally. That would be fascinating to me and it certainly wouldn't have to be... No, I wouldn't recommend acting over anything else. I would just take my cue from him.

So, you like to listen? I do like to listen. Yes, I do. I think I can say. 'Yes'.

Independence Day: Resurgence opens in UK cinemas on 24 June







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Knight of Cups

Directed by TERRENCE MALICK Starring **CHRISTIAN BALE** CATE BLANCHETT **NATALIE PORTMAN** Released

6 MAY



ANTICIPATION.

It's Terrence frickin' Malick... Stand up and pay attention.



ENJOYMENT.

It's a toughie. Enjoyment not quite the word for it...



IN RETROSPECT.

As with all of his films, blossoms into something unique and beautiful.

errence Malick's Knight of Cups explores the difference in such terms as 'change', 'regression', 'evolution' and 'rebirth'. Photo albums are obsolete, cultural relics, caked in the dust of time. Electronic media has seen to that by offering something new in their place. A photograph is now a jpeg or a Vine. It exists on a phone or a drive. One wrong flick of the thumb and it's gone forever. Malick tries to find some valuable convergence in these ideas, whether there's a way to make something that's big, deep, profound, abstract - everything great cinema should aspire to be - but using the tools, the imagery and the language of the technological present.

The conclusion reached is that now, looking through an album of photographs is an active rather than passive process. Knight of Cups encapsulates that cinematic potential, weaving together stocks and styles as a way of cataloguing the things we remember and the ways we have of remembering them. A scene of toddlers frolicking on a front lawn - perhaps an early remembrance of the film's louche hero, Rick (Christian Bale) - is captured with abrasive, pixellated video. A leap into the future is then represented with a conversion to gorgeous, pin-sharp 65mm film.

Rick is going through his own transition. Forlorn and directionless, his time is spent avoiding his lucrative day job writing comedy movies, and harking back to the numerous sexual trysts of yore. It's a personal search for happiness and meaning, raking over the peach-hued ashes of lost love as a way to form a present-day game plan. His future - and the impossibility of his quest - is represented by tarot cards which make up the film's chapter headings. Rick's anxiety is melancholic more than angry. He doesn't seem suicidal, despite a predilection for jumping into water wearing the same black suit/black shirt combo. He's accepting of the world as it is. He's peaceable, but agitated.

Though this may read as a dereliction of critical duty, it feels pointless to try and divine a finite meaning from this text. A game of second-guessing Terrence Malick's thematic motives is an exercise in pure-brewed futility. That's not to say Knight of Cups isn't an inclusive film - it is just that. It wants you to build theories, engineer conspiracies, link together fragments of information as a way to decipher Rick's vague but poignant predicament. Moving beyond literal readings, the film is about the way we contemplate, the manner in which our minds index information and, perhaps its most unique achievement, the difficulty of affixing a distinct emotional reaction to an event from the past. There's barely a conventional line of movie dialogue. It's all piecemeal conversations and overheard declamations. Words and music join as one, they are sounds or staccato poetry, no longer a mode with which to comunicate.

This 'story' is being delivered from the perspective of a man, and so accusations of misogyny have been levelled at it. If you're making a film where openness is part of its design, then there's really no come back to this response. Maybe the moments of Rick tapping the rim of his Wayfarers and gawping at impossibly beautiful women (often below the waste line) as they strut down LA sidewalks are merely the primal, erotically-charged images that he has catalogued in his memory? Is there a difference between making a film about a character who may have misogynist tendencies, and endorsing those tendencies? Is this an aggressively honest (and objective) depiction of macho instincts, or a symbolic (and subjective) channelling of its director's rapacious libido?

We're left to guess how and why Rick connects with and subsequently breaks away from this cortege of women. His relationship with an older women (played by Cate Blanchett) crumbles because they failed to have children. He connects with Imogen Poots at a pool party which, for her, never seems to end. He later indulges in the male fantasy of running away to Vegas with a live-wire stripper (Teresa Palmer). Rick is obsessed with the beach. In his head, he loves to paddle in the waves with his current squeeze. The women in his life are like waves, rolling up and smothering his body, then, drawing back, dissipating into nothingness.

Cinema is a language which Malick has mastered, and so he is now trying to invent a new form of communication. Everything in Knight of Cups can be found in conventional romantic or dramatic genre films - the Dickensian tale of a man learning lessons from his actions, trying to understand what love is, atoning for things he thinks are sins, railing against things that harm his temperement. More than a stand-alone feature, it's the continuation of a journey, of an artist looking back over his career and asking what he can do differently. It's a humble and humbling epic that channels theology, religion, philosophy, architecture, ecology and ethnology through simple bursts of primal emotion. It's like an old master painting a God emoji. DAVID JENKINS







Christian Bale

Wales' finest son sheds his batsuit to search for God and transcendence in Terrence Malick's *Knight of Cups*

hristian Bale's reputation has been fearsome ever since audio was leaked of him losing his shit at a crew member on the set of *Terminator: Salvation*. Call it The Malick Effect, or call it the volatility of being human, but the man we spoke to about his role in *Knight of Cups* was a complete gentleman who opened up with detail and ease.

LWLies: Knight of Cups takes place primarily in Los Angeles. How do you personally relate to how the city is depicted? Bale: When I first went out to LA, I got invited to things and it just blew my mind. You thought, 'I've never seen people like this, or didn't know that anyone lived this way at all.' To me, parties had been a case of hanging out under a motorway, smoke a few joints and smash a beer bottle. Suddenly, you're at these amazing mansions and beach houses. I was in awe of it when I first came out. Then, after a while, I realised, yeah, it's not for me.

What was your first conversation with Terrence Malick about this film? We never had a formal conversation, like, 'Christian, I would like you to play this particular character.' We spoke about this project and other projects and ideas and, eventually, the character who became Rick. It developed slowly until, 'Hey, let's go do that one.' We'd worked on *The New World* together where there was a script, even though he liked to go away from it a great deal. You could see that he was heading in this direction. He said to me that he wanted to do something where we would discuss character – really work that out properly – but there would never be a script. We would figure it out and discover it as we went. I imagine that he had a pure idea of what the story would hopefully be, but was very happy to see it change. I imagine that, naturally, through the way we shot this, by the end he had multiple films that he could have made. So it was a great surprise when I watched it, because I didn't know exactly what it was going to be.

Does this freestyle approach mean that there's no official start and end date? Roughly, yeah. We actually moved very quickly. The motto was, 'Start before we're ready.' I'd walk on set and the camera would be rolling already and I'd just go, 'Alright, figure out what I'm doing.' He'd have people coming at me. I didn't know what they were going to say or do.

What happy accidents came from this technique? When you don't really know what you're meant to be doing, you have that lost look on your face and you're confused. But it's good confusion. Or somebody else might not realise that this is the moment that they should start talking about something, so you don't talk. Where there was meant to be a scene, where

there was dialogue, it ended up being silent because the person didn't realise that the camera was rolling. You get these happy accidents that end up being quite wonderful.

Was there anything from the shoot that you regret is not in the finished film? I don't remember. Terry's a great destroyer of vanity. You might do something where normally you'd think, 'Wow, man, I did a really good scene,' then you'd look up and the camera's looking over that way instead. You learn, 'Right, just do it for yourself and then if he does decide to turn the camera around, don't try to repeat what you just did. Alright, so it might not be as great, or dramatic, or memorable but, just keep it truthful.' That was all that he ever looked for.

The language in the film is poetic and spiritual. Is that the way Malick talks when he directs? He's very comical. He's very humorous, Terry. You wouldn't be disappointed. He's a wonderful conversationalist and has some wonderful insights and comments and a very different way of communicating. But then he also has a great silliness, like everyone should have. His sets are very conducive to feeling courageous to do whatever you feel like doing, and he's very accepting of that. He really enjoys people. He likes hearing their ideas. He doesn't just want to impose his own, which sometimes you get with directors.

Your character goes to the desert to sort out his life. Do you have any rituals for when you feel unsatisfied about something in your life? I can be quite obsessive about things so starting with something really minute and studying and trying to understand it in a very small way. That relaxes me and then you can gradually open up and deal with bigger things and more people. And music. I listen to music a great deal when I'm feeling at a loose end. That's always been very important to me. This film is more like music, or literature, than a film because there's an openness to the interpretation of it, where you can feel very personally about it regardless of the intention of the creator. Some films are so structured that there's no doubt about exactly what was intended and how you should feel. With this, I feel that you're involved in the invention as an audience member.

How about the other Malick film [provisionally titled Weightless] that was shot around the same time? Things happened and I wasn't able to really be there. I only managed to do a couple of days, which means I won't be in it!



Natalie Portman

The actor and director on the transormative experience that came from working with Terrence Malick.

atalie Portman scarcely needs an introduction. She made her debut in Luc Besson's *Léon* as a 12-year-old girl who falls in love with a French assassin. She has been a star ever since. Such is the respect that Terrence Malick commands among actors, even an A-lister of Portman's calibre has been yearning to work with him for years. She got her wish twice over, playing one of Christian Bale's love interests in *Knight of Cups*, while securing an unknown role in his next film, *Weightless*.

LWLies: What was the first film directed by Terrence Malick that you saw? Portman: I saw Days of Heaven when I was in college and was just blown away. It's been my favourite movie since. Afterwards, I immediately saw all the other ones.

How did he reach out to you? I met him 10 years ago because I admired him so much and asked if I'd be able to meet him. He was super lovely and we kept in touch a little bit over the years. One day I got a phone call from him, saying, 'Would you like to do these two movies?' I said, 'Yes. Anything you want. I'm there!'

Do you have any idea when the other film is going to come out? I

wish I knew more but I don't. I worked on it longer than I worked on *Knight of Cups...* like, three weeks. I worked with Michael Fassbender, and Rooney Mara and Ryan Gosling a little bit. Cate Blanchett's in it although we didn't work together. We shot in Austin. I might be cut out. I have absolutely no idea. I know that I don't play the same character at all – different name, different hair colour. I can't imagine that they're meant to be part of the same story although maybe they're part of a series. I don't know. Your guess is as good as mine!

Did working with him give you confidence as a director yourself?

I was very lucky to get to work with him before directing my own film *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, because he reminds you that there are no rules. Even though every director is different, the ritual of the day on a movie set is virtually identical from set to set. You go for hair and make-up, you go for a rehearsal, they do the lighting set-up. You shoot one direction, you do three takes or – if you're on a Fincher movie – you do a hundred takes, apparently! Then they shoot the other way, you hit the mark, say your lines, the same lines. On his films, there's no lighting set-up. There's a small crew. The camera's improvised. You never do the same thing twice. You never say the same lines twice. You never hit a mark. You always need to be moving and it's very free and spirited – always looking to

capture something beautiful and trying to incorporate chance. If there's a helicopter, you pan up to a helicopter; a beautiful bird flies by; we'll go shoot that for an hour – taking advantage of everything the world offers to you and not being like, 'That's a mistake!' On a normal movie, a civilian walks into your shot and you yell, 'Cut!' On Terry's movies, someone walks in by accident, you start a conversation with them and include them in the scene. Then afterwards the producers try to get a release from them. My film was more conventional in its rituals, but I still feel like we brought the energy of embracing chance.

Do you think personal crises over life's meaning are strongly felt in places like Hollywood and Los Angeles? Modern man's search for something but not knowing what it is, that's something everyone probably has on some level. LA is a place where people go who are searching – whether they're musicians or actors or writers. There's a Saul Bellow quote about how if you shook the country on its side, everything that wasn't grounded would fall in LA. There's something to that.

Christian Bale as Rick goes through a lot of women in the film and naysayers say that the women are interchangeable.

It's an easy way to look at the movie, if you say that. The way it's told is stream-of-consciousness, which I think is how many of us remember life. We don't remember a recorded conversation that lasted 15 minutes. We remember the way someone touched us. Many of the characters have different ways of impacting Rick. I love how Imogen Poots' character says to him, 'You're not looking for love. You're looking for a love experience.' He's trying to place something on these women, as opposed to trying to get an insight into who they are and then remembering things like Cate Blanchett's character touching that man – in that one gesture is a whole world of humanity that he obviously knows he's missing. With my character, they have this very close passionate relationship that they really think is love. That's sullied when there's a consequence. He can have these dalliances with no consequences, then when there is a consequence, it's a turning point for him.

Does it drive you crazy that you make something that feels so personally profound and people can misunderstand it? No, I love that it can be interpreted in so many ways. That's the beauty of Terry's movies. They're not going to tell anyone what they're supposed to think or feel. It has a lot to do with what you bring to it. He gives you a lot of space to reflect and meditate on everything. It's participatory in that way



Remainder

Directed by
OMER FAST
Starring
TOM STURRIDGE
CUSH JUMBO
ED SPELEERS
Released
24 JUNE



ANTICIPATION.

An ambitious project for a first-time director.



ENJOYMENT.

A head-spinning and often exhilarating mystery.



IN RETROSPECT.

This one lingers in the memory.

ssentially, you've got to forget it ever happened," the solicitor tells his client. "Put it behind you and start a new life, on your terms, with incredible resources." That's easier said than done. Tom (Tom Sturridge) has just received an £8.5 million payout as compensation for being severely injured in a freak accident - but how can a man move forward with his life when both his body and mind still bear such fresh scars? As he hobbles around his small flat, fragments of memories keep flashing into Tom's ruptured brain, giving him a reason to exploit his sudden and unexpected wealth. He finds a location that matches the home in his mind's eye and hires actors to play roles within it, hoping that some kind of Proustian spark - the smell of liver? The sound of a piano? - will reconnect him with his former self.

We are watching a man literally constructing his memories, and while *Remainder* superficially resembles Charlie Kaufman's *Synecdoche, New York*, the film is actually an adaptation of Tom McCarthy's acclaimed 2005 novel, brought to the screen by visual artist Omer Fast. His gallery work has always explored the boundaries between memory, reconstruction and reality, and so it makes sense that he would feel a kinship with McCarthy's book. At times, Fast's inexperience as a feature director shows, notably in the slightly generic performances offered by some of the supporting cast. Yet he directs with a refreshing confidence, finding the sweet spot between disorienting or confounding the viewer and keeping us hooked.

Fast offers an interesting perspective on London too. As the rich and feckless character moving to Brixton and modifying the area according to his own whims, Tom is a symbolic representation of the forces of gentrification currently plaguing the city. It's no coincidence that as Tom and his crew move into their new home, we see a young black family being forced to move out. Combined with his frequently obtuse, prickly and controlling behaviour, this makes Tom a difficult protagonist to get behind. Sturridge, however, has a wounded, naive quality that succeeds in making him a more sympathetic figure than he might have been in other hands.

Crucially, Fast also seems well aware of the inherent absurdity of the premise, and he embraces that aspect of it. The escalating tension of the narrative dovetails nicely with a welcome streak of dry humour. Arsher Ali's deliciously deadpan turn as Tom's 'fixer', unflappably meeting all of these increasingly ridiculous demands, is perfectly pitched, while Tom's direction to the masked actors playing his vague memories ("There's a small cupboard with a broom. I don't want you to use it ever, but you have to think about it") present him as a sharp parody of perfectionist film directors. In fact, while it succeeds impressively as an exciting and stimulating thriller, Remainder resonates more as a contemplation of the artistic process itself; the obsessive desire to recreate a specific vision, and the danger of becoming consumed by it. PHIL CONCANNON



The Keeping Room

Directed by
DANIEL BARBER
Starring
BRIT MARLING
HAILEE STEINFELD
SAM WORTHINGTON
Released
17 JUNE



ANTICIPATION.

A female-led Civil War yarn? We're in. Directed by the guy who made Harry Brown? Erm...



ENJOYMENT.

Effectively tense, but troubling.



IN RETROSPECT.

A well-intentioned home invasion thriller that can't quite address all the issues it raises. he Keeping Room begins with a scene of abrupt and terrible violence – and it is exacted against women. Capturing a precarious moment in American history, Daniel Barber's film focuses on the ravaged losing side in the immediate aftermath of the American Civil War, and on the young inheritors of that destruction. Sitting somewhere between a western and a home invasion thriller, the film opens with a rogue Union soldier who commits a rape and covers his tracks by killing the innocent bystanders.

It's 1865, and our setting is an unspecified location known only as 'The American South.' It's a bad place to be during the closing ebbs of the war - the bloodiest chapter in the young nation's history. Semi-feral deserters maraud through the battered countryside, sexually assaulting and murdering their way across an old Confederacy now deprived of so many of its ablebodied men. We are introduced to sisters Augusta (Brit Marling) and Louise (Hailee Steinfeld), eking out a sparse existence on their absent parents' homestead. They're long-haired Southern waifs armed with shotguns, leaving us to imagine the fate that had visited their family and neighbours. When Augusta heads to the nearest town for supplies, she stumbles into the same malevolent soldiers with moonshine on their breaths. They follow her home.

The sisters are accompanied by Mad (Muna Otaru), a female slave who seems to maintain her role in spite of the fact that there's little antebellum society left to enforce it. The hierarchy is at one point challenged with an exchange of slaps, quickly dispelling any illusion of Mad's subservience. And while the women's burgeoning solidarity is heartening, the particulars

seem off. Barber won't fully commit to 19th-century attitudes, and the girls' ability to unlearn their slave-owning upbringing rings false. Barber adopts a brooding style, foregrounding the uneasy stillness of the countryside in the expectation that the quiet will soon be shattered. The eerie hush is accompanied by an apocalyptic sense of isolation. Augusta wonders, 'What if all the men killed all the other men? What if it's the end of the world?'

When *The Keeping Room* evolves into shotgunblasting, house-under-siege mode, it immediately becomes less interesting. This is simple, blunt-force dramatic territory; the threat of rape is omnipresent throughout, and vulnerability provides the basis for the suspense. Occasionally it's uncomfortable, raising prickly questions about storytelling choices. The threat of sexual violence is an effective device, but also an easy one. Echoes of Sam Peckinpah's queasy 1971 home invasion drama, *Straw Dogs*, appear. As a director, Barber is already aquainted with exploitative violence – his only previous feature being the paranoid vigilante thriller *Harry Brown* from 2009. The spirit of that vengeful film can't help but cast a long shadow.

Nonetheless, this film is ambitious in its attempts to highlight the treatment of women at the time. When Mad talks about being raped, it's a vital and devastating moment, but there's too little of it. Barber is easily lured back into action sequences, giving more attention to violent showdowns than to the alliances of the women. It inevitably overshadows the film's more complex currents and is no longer a topic that a director of westerns can continue to sideline. CHRISTINA NEWLAND



Tale of Tales

Directed by
MATTEO GARRONE
Starring
SALMA HAYEK
VINCENT CASSEL
TOBY JONES
Released
17 JUNE



ANTICIPATION.

From Gomorrah to the land of make-believe for director Garrone – we're intrigued.



ENJOYMENT.

The tales are charming and imaginative but fall away when it comes to the punchline.



IN RETROSPECT.

We're tickled, we're charmed and we're still wondering what the point was. e isn't someone with the same recognition-factor as the Brothers Grimm or Hans Christian Andersen, but the 16th-century Neapolitan poet and collector of folk tales Giambattista Basile predated both with his famous compendium, 'The Tale of Tales'. Traditionally, such cautionary narratives have been configured to turn young minds into well-behaved citizens – which is why the likes of Walt Disney have been so attracted to them. But the stuff here, which Gomorrah director Matteo Garrone has dedicated to his own kids, proves at times profoundly, grotesquely strange.

In a trio of medieval monarchies, various royals discover that absolute power doesn't necessarily make life any easier. Take befuddled ruler Toby Jones, whose teenage daughter keeps bleating on about marrying a prince, when what he really wants to do is get back to his pet flea once a mere speck, now nourished so it's the size of a small pony. Meanwhile, across the border, his majesty Vincent Cassel is making it his mission to bed every one of his nubile young female subjects, until he's refused by a golden-voiced peasantgirl, who keeps him out of her hovel because she's actually a wrinkly senior citizen busily calculating how to turn the situation to her advantage. Elsewhere, in a country not so far away, queen Salma Hayek is wondering whether she was right to follow the advice of the mysterious seer who told her royal hubby (John C Reilly) that the best way to get her pregnant was to kill a sea monster and bring back its heart for her to eat.

The sight of the prim and graceful Hayek tearing into a hunk of offal she can barely see beyond is just one of the memorable images in Garrone's handsomely assembled 2015 Cannes competition entry. Assorted heritage locations look the part as well, giving the whole thing the lush, captivating quality of a storybook brought to life. That in turn seems to have freed the cast to approach their roles with a certain child-like glee, sporting a generous array of assorted ruffs, doublet and hose. Cassel appears to be taking the mickey out of himself, John C Reilly plays it deadpan knowing the very sight of him in that clobber will make us smile - but then we're smiling already at Toby Jones' wide-eyed infatuation with his new insect friend.

Curiously, though, for all the nuggety goodness, it's as tale-telling that the film proves slightly underwhelming, since the sundry fables all tend to peak a bit too early, and Garrone's seemingly haphazard way of cutting between them doesn't always make the best of their dramatic potential. Slightly disappointing really, leaving us with an exquisitely decorated folly which seems to lack a compelling reason why it's telling these stories and telling them now. Pier Paolo Pasolini, for instance, returned to the 'Arabian Nights' fables as a way of exploring liberated sexuality, while William Goldman's The Princess Bride maintained that classic fairytales were a match for modern Hollywood. But here? In the end, we're really none the wiser.

TREVOR JOHNSTON

TOM STURRIDGE

BASED ON THE MIND BENDING NOVEL BY TOM MCCARTHY



HEAD SPINNING & EXHILARATING

"EXCEPTIONAL...
IT HAS LODGED FIRMLY
IN MY PSYCHE."



A BRAIN SCRAMBLING THRILLER

LITTLE WHITE LIES

LOUISA BUCK - THE ART NEWSPAPER

JAMIE GRAHAM - TOTAL FILM



IN CINEMAS & ON DEMAND JUNE 24

THE PRINCE A TESTOLY FINS ON ANDISONAL PARK PROCESS ON ASSESSANCE WAS STANDED ON AN AREA OF THE PARK OF THE SAME O



















Love & Friendship

Directed by
WHIT STILLMAN
Starring
KATE BECKINSALE
CHLOË SEVIGNY
XAVIER SAMUEL
Released
27 MAY



ANTICIPATION.

Whit Stillman can do no wrong.



ENJOYMENT.

So, so good. Shows that literary adaptations can make good movies.



IN RETROSPECT.

Like all of Stillman's films, there's major re-watch factor.

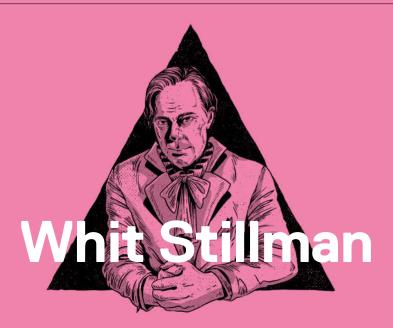
hit Stillman is a director fascinated by the idea of people gladly displaced from their own time: foppish debutantes abide by romantic era courting rituals in '90s Manhattan in Metropolitan; a good old limbo contest trumps modern jazz in Barcelona; and lovers of disco music band together while boxes of wax platters are torched at baseball games in The Last Days of Disco. With his ebullient and scaldingly droll latest - a superlative screwball adaptation of Jane Austen's novella 'Lady Susan' - Stillman may have finally found an ensemble of characters who exist in their own time. The problem, though, is that quite a few of them want out, desperate to embrace whatever progressive notions the future holds. In fact, while his past work has often celebrated nostalgia and even kitsch, this new film is his first to reject such fripperies in favour of hard, unsentimental reason. And it's all the more hilarious for it.

Love & Friendship sees puffed-up gentry adorned in lace-trimmed garments (colour-coded as to the capacity of their imagination) trying to get their prissy minds around the concept of modern romance. Or in some cases, doing their best to keep antiquated traditions of courtship burning bright. Kate Beckinsale astonishes as a maven of social manipulation named Lady Susan Vernon, introduced in a top-to-toe black combo replete with ostentatious feathered plumes. To call her a chiseller would be over-stating it; she's just ruthlessly independent and out to preserve her own tiny island of high-minded gratification. The only other soul allowed to visit is Chloë Sevigny's displaced American society dame Alicia Johnson. Horse-drawn carriages and discreet, covered byways are the venues of their

plotting, as Mr Johnson (Stephen Fry) has prohibited his spouse from fraternising with Lady Susan due to her unsavoury reputation.

Recently widowed, Susan takes on the task of coupling up her bashful daughter Frederica (Morfydd Clark) with any wealthy loon who's happy to take the bait. Opting to use the grand country stack of Churchill as her figurative chess board serves to complicate matters, as all of her scheming is being witnessed and interpreted (sometimes correctly, often not) by coldly sympathetic sister-in-law Catherine Vernon (Emma Greenwell) and her lantern-jawed, non-oafish brother, Reginald DeCourcy (Xavier Samuel), himself possibly harbouring designs on the sphinx-like Susan.

While it all remains exorbitantly enjoyable on a superficial level (just hearing these actors twist their tongues around the dialogue is a delight in itself), there's more to the film than even those with their spyglass pressed to the screen might see. While its roots are sunk deeply in the traditions of dress-up chamber comedy, the film also depicts politics and business as games of verbal double-dealing which require the player to expunge all traces of physical and emotional weakness. Stillman's work has often favoured building up characters and wrapping a looseweave narrative around their eccentric travails, though Love & Friendship is plotted to intricate perfection, with staging, choreography, timing and geography all paramount to the subtle mechanics of the comedy. The illusion of frivolity, where levity and absentmindedness help to flesh out delicate philosophical subtext, makes this a grand cru comedy. DAVID JENKINS



The dean of
American comedy
cinema talks tackling
(and acing) a lost
Jane Austen classic.

inematic delights are rarely as absolute as Love & Friendship, the latest from American writer/director Whit Stillman. Characters in his previous comedies, such as 1990's Metropolitain or 1994's Barcelona, all seemed to exist out of their own time, but with this latest movie, an adaptation of one of Jane Austen's juvenile novellas, people, place and time achieve a sublime connection.

LWLies: When you're dealing with Jane Austen, do people immediately see dollar signs? Stillman: If there were dollar signs, there would've been a lot more Jane Austen movies. There was a bit of an Austen adaptation period around '95, but not a lot since then. I'm particularly fond of Sense and Sensibility as the opposite of what we do. It's very romantic and we're very comic. I think the films work together.

Could you do a purely romantic movie, without the comic? I wouldn't have done that film in the same way. I really admire what Ang Lee and Emma Thompson did with it. I was tangentially

involved in that film. I had conversations with the producers, and I was incredibly impressed with how it turned out. I can't say exactly how I was going to be involved. One of the great things about that story is the predicament of the girls. The structure of her narrative really works well.

How much interaction did you have with the official Jane Austen society? Bits and pieces through Twitter. They've always been good and supportive. The Dutch Jane Austen Society came to our screening at the Rotterdam Film Festival and they loved it. It's a different kind of thing. A lot of Jane Austen people just like the world. They seem pretty accepting, though they do turn against adaptations they don't like. They don't mind when people do a Jane Austen film like a Brontë film, which is what a lot of people said about Joe Wright's *Pride & Prejudice*.

So the idea for the film came about many years ago. Yes. I was having cocktails in London and I was chatting with a guy about this obscure, very funny, very unusual Jane Austen novella, and he was terribly encouraging. He was a neophyte who hadn't done anything in film. He was a wannabe-producer type, but he ended up marrying his American girlfriend, moving to New York and getting into renewable energy. So I was off the hook. But it was fun having someone who encouraged it. It was the project I would always return to between script deadlines and deliveries. There was no real pressure on this one. It was like a block of marble that had to be chipped away. It was helpful that you could come back to it and peel away some more text. It's a goldmine of funny thoughts, senses and observations. There was a point where the manager I was with thought it was all set to go and the casting people thought it was a good idea. And then I was re-reading it and it just wasn't ready.

We read that you inspected the original manuscript of 'Lady Susan'? I did it online. Everyone can. It's the Morgan Library website. There was an exhibition of her manuscripts which I went to. That was years ago, but I loved it. I was actually looking for whether she had put a title on it. I wanted to change the title. I don't believe it is on the manuscript. Her nephew is supposed to have added it. I understand why, as 'Northanger Abbey' was originally titled 'Susan', so it would've been strange if this was 'Lady Susan'. Also, another justification for using her juvenile story title, 'Love & Friendship', was that many of her projects she started with a character title and then she switched to impressive nouns, 'Sense & Sensibility' started out as 'Eleanor and Marianne', 'Pride & Prejudice' started out as 'First Impressions'.

Was the process of dramatising the book tough? It seemed like a really tough task and it did take a lot of time. But basically there was an engine under the hood. When people work on material that doesn't have an engine, it doesn't have that tension to takes it to interesting places. And that's what's so frustrating about the film business: so many times you hear people saying that everyone's done such good work, but in fact, it's still dead



Heart of a Dog

Directed by

LAURIE ANDERSON

Released

20 MAY



ANTICIPATION.

An essay film about a dog? We'll bite.



ENJOYMENT.

Laurie Anderson's requiem for many dreams...



IN RETROSPECT.

...and the rebirth of so many more.

aurie Anderson's voice has the quality of a meditative yoga instructor. During *Heart of a Dog*, she speaks precisely and calmly over a collage of expressionist images, as if to hypnotise the viewer into a perpetual dream state. The result is a moving essay film that lulls you into a sensory-laden trance. In this headspace, we are given the freedom to consider storytelling and memory in a new light. Call and response questions provide otherworldly assurance. 'What are days for? To wake you up. What are nights for? To fall through time.'

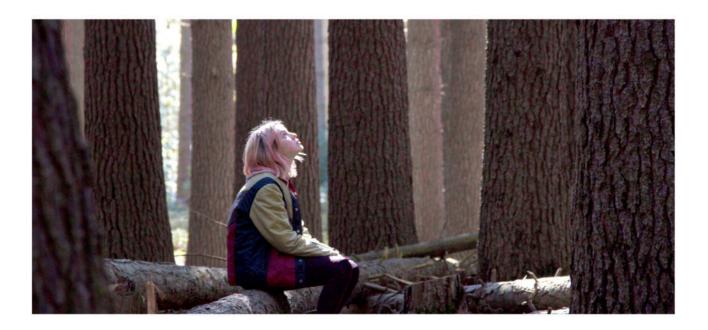
Covering a lot of philosophical and emotional terrain in a mere 75 minutes, Anderson contemplates everything from post-9/11 New York City, the "Tibetan Book of the Dead', Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein. But her beloved rat terrier, Lolabelle, and how she perceives the world, remains the essential pivot point. Curious, loyal, and always up for a good time, the canine plays a central role in the film's examination of death and perseverance, becoming a spiritual conduit to what Anderson calls, "living in the gap between the moment that is expiring and the one that is arising."

Riddled with tangential threads, manipulated film stock, and a welter of superimposed images, *Heart of a Dog* swirls together colours and textures like raging rapids. Water droplets slide down panes of glass. CCTV footage numbly tracks everyday citizens. Opposing styles don't just attract automatically, but Anderson proves a master of placing them together to feel less disjointed. She manipulates footage of home movies, and then animates it, providing it with new life and elasticity. Her perspective, like the one she imagines Lolabelle to be experiencing, favours

malleability over limitation. This approach comes to fruition when Anderson tells the story of her mother's deathbed ramblings, and when she begins to grapple with Lolabelle's late-life blindness and degenerating health.

Language becomes the great unifier in Heart of a Dog. Anderson's nimble words cascade together, gathering momentum and meaning through jarring edits and clashes of imagery. As Lolabelle passes on, Anderson becomes her shaman-like guide: "You are not alone in leaving this world," she says. Through it all we get a glimpse at unselfish love, one woman's struggle to release the pain rather than see it as a symbol of selfish regret. "Every love story is a ghost story." Anderson believes in the profundity of this David Foster Wallace quote. It's why her film is just as much about the loss of her husband, legendary singer Lou Reed, who died of liver disease in 2013. His dynamic energy can be felt in every single frame. Maybe that's why Anderson, a self-described "sky worshipper," spends so much time looking up, reconfiguring the definition of absence to mean something more hopeful and timeless.

The film's illusory qualities are always deeply personal, never more so during Anderson's introduction to one of her final anecdotes: "Let me tell you a story about a story." Within this layered construct, ghosts need comfort too, and the film's last gasp suggests that she is guiding Lolabelle toward a new beginning. Death becomes her, and all of us eventually. But to paraphrase Reed, that's just the inevitability of time turning us around. GLENN HEATH JR



The Daughter

Directed by
SIMON STONE
Starring
PAUL SCHNEIDER
ODESSA YOUNG
GEOFFREY RUSH
Released
27 MAY



ANTICIPATION.

An acclaimed stage production makes its way to the big screen, with writer-director and some cast members along for the ride.



ENJOYMENT.

Festen your seatbelts.



IN RETROSPECT.

A solid debut feature, with strong hopes for Australian cinema both behind and in front of the camera. brief glimpse of the credits and promotional material for Simon Stone's *The Daughter* might cause red flags to pop up in the mind of certain viewers. But fear not, as any negative preconceptions you might harbour about theatre directors making the leap from stage to screen are dispelled pretty swiftly.

Set in modern day Australia, the film is a reworking of Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen's 'The Wild Duck', an 1884 play about an idealistic son exposing his corrupt merchant father's deceit, only for the reveal to backfire and destroy the lives of those he intended to help. Stone's confident direction successfully forgoes the staginess that can often hamper screen adaptations of plays; it's less in the vein of former National Theatre don, Nicholas Hytner, whose screen adaptation of Alan Bennett's 'The History Boys' almost felt like little more than a filmed play, and more in line with the lyrical, moody and brooding style of fellow Antipodean Jane Campion, in tone if not necessarily subject matter.

Returning to the Australian timber town from which he fled to the US, Christian is set to attend the marriage of his aloof father, Henry (Geoffrey Rush), to a much younger woman, Anna (Anna Torv). An alcoholic teetering off the wagon, Christian is meant to be serving as his father's best man despite despising every fibre of his being. And so he ditches most of the rehearsal to catch up with childhood pal Oliver (Ewen Leslie), who's just been made redundant by the closure of Henry's timber mill. This meet-up also gives him some time to

forge a connection with Oliver's bright-spark, teenage daughter, Hedvig (Odessa Young).

A penchant for bluish hues veering between both the warm and chilly is where that Campion comparison begins to register on a visual level. Yet anyone familiar with Thomas Vinterberg's 1998 feature *Festen* might find traces of that film's DNA in Stone's take on a fraught family reunion descending into chaos on account of a patriarch's devastating secret. A number of key Campion collaborators (Sam Neill, composer Mark Bradshaw) are among the cast and crew, which also includes American Paul Schneider, a scene-stealer from Campion's 2009 feature *Bright Star*. His character, Christian, is our initial entry point into the drama, yet the film goes on to distribute equal attention among its vast, exceptional ensemble.

As the title ominously foreshadows, Hedvig becomes the story's focal point as Christian seeks to expose certain suspicions regarding his pop and the damage he's wreaked upon the town. While the film's narrative twists are always a mite predictable, it steadies the ship with its sheer emotional force, hitting many a raw nerve thanks to the vulnerability and simmering pain conveyed by its central players - Leslie and Young are particular standouts. The fallout from the revelations is especially wrenching and destructive. There's a claustrophobic, menacing quality that makes it at times feel like all the dark secrets may manifest as literal demons lurking in the shadows amid the wintry woodlands. It's a family tragedy with a tinge of the spectral. JOSH SLATER-WILLIAMS



Green Room

Directed by
JEREMY SAULNIER
Starring
IMOGEN POOTS
ANTON YELCHIN
PATRICK STEWART
Released
13 MAY



ANTICIPATION.

Saulnier's Blue Ruin hinted at great things.



ENJOYMENT.

Again, hints at greater things to come.



IN RETROSPECT.

More to it that may meet the eye.

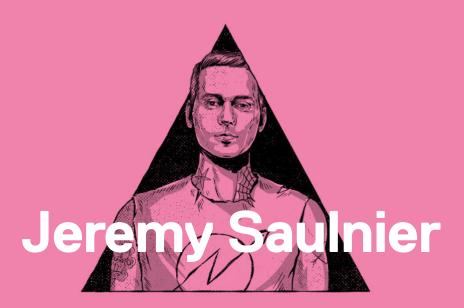
eing in politics today isn't about being a good person, it's about convincing the world of that fact. This is achievable through time honoured grit and determination, or actually being a naturally enlightened soul who has ideas and is able to communicate them to a broad, appreciative audience. Otherwise, you can linger behind a smokescreen where self-image and public perception will always trump real substance.

Jeremy Saulnier's determinately nasty *Green Room* is about the insane lengths that some political movements will go to preserve some semblance of credibility, even when they have less-than-nothing going for them to start with. A neo-Nazi enclave working under the cover of an out-of-the-way punk venue struggle to convince the world that they're just misunderstood softies wanting to distance themselves from past PR snafus.

The group is led by the guru-like Darcy Banker (Patrick Stewart), a manipulator, a big-picture player attempting to corral the hot-headed vermin of his brood into a respectable movement. Their ranking system is based on the colour of shoelaces, usually threaded onto the type of knee-high Doc Martens used to stomp faces into a bloody pulp. A period of tranquility comes to an abrupt end when a young inductee gets brutally stabbed, and there just happens to be a band passing through on tour who witness everything. What begins as just a very uncomfortable night on the schedule turns into a nightmare cover-up scenario where death becomes an inevitability.

The writer/director's previous film, *Blue Ruin*, was praised for its terse, down-and-dirty treatment of thriller genre mechanics, and he's bopping to the same beat with this new one. He establishes characters, marks outs the playing field, and pretty soon we have a punk rockers versus tooled-up neo-Nazis scenario, the bolted door of the eponymous green room the precarious ignition pin that's preventing the whole place from blowing. The audience is party to both sides of the door, so we see how the band (the goodies), led by Anton Yelchin, plot their unlikely escape, and we see the neo-Nazis (the baddies) do their utmost to make sure this dark secret never gets out.

It's all put together with great skill, but never quite manages to deliver more than its modest, stripped-back story will allow. Even the surprises ring a little hollow, folded into the action to selfconsiously spice things up rather than to add any emotional resonance. But perhaps the film is more effective as an anti Nazi screed, mocking their delusions of grandeur and sincere belief that their politics have mass-market potential. The film's most chilling aspect is Banker's eminently cool organisation skills - he delivers orders to his minions like he was either waiting for this to happen, or it has happened many times before. Green Room is about how modern politics is the process of averting a crisis. An impromptu encore shout out goes to British actress Imogen Poots as a distraught, panda-eyed skin who defects to the punks when she witnesses what her pals are really all about. DAVID JENKINS



The *Green Room*director on how to ride the wave of your first indie hit.

eremy Saulnier's second feature, the self-financed, 2013 lo-fi revenge thriller, *Blue Ruin*, won him the FIPRESCI Prize at Cannes and a welter of critical plaudits. So when we met him during the 2015 London Film Festival, where he was promoting the 'siegepunk' thriller *Green Room*, we were curious to find out what this success has meant for his filmmaking.

"Blue Ruin completely changed the horizon. I was doing corporate videos prior to that movie. Going all in, taking a gamble on that movie paid off in ways I never expected. Also, getting in to the Director's Fortnight [at Cannes], to launch that movie on that international platform - I had access to international financing companies and foreign sales agents. I would never call myself an auteur, but to be labelled that was transformative, especially after coming off Murder Party in 2007, which was a fun, culty, self-referential gonzo comedy. After Blue Ruin I was overwhelmed by the attention I got from the industry that I had been seeking for almost two decades. It was just a matter of instant access - that stage where you get

this VIP access card, and you're also having high-level meetings, you're approached by agents and managers, and when you have a conversation, people listen to you. That's huge.

"With Blue Ruin, we tried traditional methods of financing with a lot of the same people I'm talking to now, and the answer was just, 'There's just not enough there. You can't do it with that actor, leave alone the director on the director's chair.' So it's just been hard to adapt to a world where people listen to you, are seeking you for other jobs, and having the folk for our distribution - so I think I may eventually have retreated from that, and Green Room was my answer. I'm not quite going to get sucked into the studio yet, I'm not going to try and be too lofty, I'm going to regress a bit emotionally, and make a very hardcore genre flick that's for my former self and the friends that I grew up making movies with who taught me camera techniques, and introduced me to directors like early Peter Jackson and Martin Scorsese. I had to look back, feel safe, and make a film for a core genre audience. I also had to surprise myself, because I think there was a certain amount of expectation coming after Blue Ruin that I wanted to subvert in this movie. By having full access to what some would call higher taste level stuff and saying, 'No, I'll be true.'

"Green Room was a title I had five or six years before Blue Ruin, so the logical progression of my films should have been Murder Party, Green Room and then Blue Ruin, but because Blue Ruin was designed from the script level to be something I could control with access to sparse locations, resources and actors,

it came before *Green Room* as a necessity. I had access to [actor] Macon Blair, and an old rusty blue Bonneville, and my parents' house, and Macon's cousin's property, and I put that together. I do things very practically, and I think I'm proud to be following a trajectory that's fun to track for being a little unexpected. So with the next movie I'm not going to do something that's like *Green Room* at all.

"I think *Green Room* is a hybrid, tonally, of my first two films. You know, *Blue Ruin* being stark and very deep emotionally, and *Murder Party* being a lot more fun, irreverent and goofy. This one is grounded – it's serious, but it has that sort of excitement level and a little bit more enjoyability. I wouldn't say it lacks emotional depth, but just it's very much buried under the surface.

"I knew this was going to be a brutal film, that it was going to be a make-up show. I love and respect that art, as far as the action choreography and cinematic violence and practical makeup effects, so I knew this could certainly dip into horror territory. The way I approached this was: I'm making a war film. It's about this real, very human conflict. The motivations for the violence, they're all very practical. As brutal as they are, no-one here is sadistic, they're just preserving themselves, protecting their interests. The motivation for the violence, I think, sets up the tone. From here it is just a straight-up battle, and it is not a torture session. All the parties involved would have avoided this conflict if they could have. But it's about one act of violence leading to a whole night of carnage. That was the inspiration. That's all I'm doing."





Departure

Directed by ANDREW STEGGALL
Starring JULIET STEVENSON, ALEX LAWTHER,
PHÉNIX BROSSARD
Released 20 MAY

his is a film which searches for a definition of the word 'departure.' And it's a good one by debut director Andrew Steggall. It sees Elliot (Alex Lawther) and his mother, Beatrice (Juliet Stevenson), clearing out their holiday home in the South of France prior to selling it off. A handsome teenager, Clément (Phénix Brossard), enters the fray – he is staying with his aunt while his mother is dying of cancer. Beatrice's marriage is falling apart while Elliot is trying to discover what love really is. Over a single week, the pair review their memories and search for answers.

"Do you think you can know something before you know it?" The film opens on this existential conundrum that lifts it beyond your garden variety coming-of-age movie. The revelations here are not restricted to adolescence. Elliot hides his homosexuality because he fears refusal more than the opinion of others. With 40 years of missed opportunities behind her, his mother has to grapple with a deep sense of regret. Steggall doesn't spare his characters from criticism, but he takes time to depict their inner transformations.

Visually, the film is sweetly poetic. Still shots of small details might seem unassuming at first, but they all find a symmetry in later scenes. This technique creates a total immersion within the characters' inner lives. The film looks like an impressionist painting: pale colours are lightened by the sun, while the soundtrack carries with it a strange feeling of melancholic optimism. But the most moving emotions are held in Alex Lawther's eyes: he hides his character's doubts and despair behind a genuine indolence typical of smart teenagers. His look – and particularly his oversized military jacket and notebook – recalls the romantic poets of yesteryear, especially the young Arthur Rimbaud, mentioned several times in the boys' conversations about sex and sexuality. Stevenson and Brossard's performances also ring outstandingly true, particularly as Elliot's questioning leads them to engage in their own moments of introspection. MATHILDE DUMAZET

ANTICIPATION. Every attempt to show that love knows no age and no gender is a worthwhile one.

3

ENJOYMENT.

Simply very moving.

4

IN RETROSPECT.

It might cause a few intense and poetic flashbacks.



Mon Roi

Directed by MAÏWENN

Starring VINCENT CASSEL, EMMANUELLE BERCOT,

LOUIS GARREL

Released 27 MAY

When you think about it, break ups are a lot like recovering from a cruciate ligament knee injury. In both instances, the process can be a long and painful one, but in the end you emerge stronger than before. This clumsily constructed analogy forms the basis of *Mon Roi*, the fourth feature from mono-monikered French actress and sometime director, Maïwenn.

Emmanuelle Bercot stars as Tony, a criminal lawyer thrown into a state of midlife torpor after a nasty skiing accident. Before she has a chance to settle into her new surroundings at a physical rehabilitation clinic, her therapist seamlessly cues up a series of flashbacks by probing as to whether something other than fate might have contributed to her taking a tumble. The catalyst for Tony's unrest is revealed in the form of playboy restaurateur Giorgio (Vincent Cassel), who first caught her eye at a discotheque 10 years prior. Arrogant, dangerously charming and also kind of a jerk, Giorgio sweeps Tony off her feet. As the weeks and months pass, Tony and Giorgio slowly come to the realisation they are far from a perfect fit. Indeed, they destroy one another.

As a filmmaker, Maïwenn is fascinated with relationships and how our insecurities often sour the bonds we form – be it an ethical dilemma as in *Polisse*, or, in this case, the apparently common female concern of having a loose vagina. *Mon Roi* certainly has its moments – at times it is extremely funny, at others surprisingly affecting – but its ideas about the minutiae of adult relationships are grounded more in pop psychology than proper semiotic insight. We're repeatedly told that marriage is tough, especially when you throw a kid into the equation; that people don't change (especially men, the adulterous swines); that love doesn't always conquer all. Even if there is a fair amount of truth to all this, *Mon Roi* has nothing new to say. At one point, Giorgio likens something Tony says about their relationship to a line from a Phil Collins song. On that note, one track sums up our thoughts on not just said relationship but the entire film: 'I Don't Care Anymore.' ADAM WOODWARD

ANTICIPATION. Maïwenn's child sex abuse drama, Polisse, was not great.

2

ENJOYMENT.

Lays it on a bit thick but there's plenty to like.

3

IN RETROSPECT.

But not that much...





Ma Ma

Directed by JULIO MEDEM Starring PENÉLOPE CRUZ, ÀLEX BRENDEMÜHL, **LUIS TOSAR** Released 24 JUNE

verything that's awful in the latest film by Julio Medem has nothing to do with its star and co-producer, Penélope Cruz. She is absolved of responsibility, purely for reminding us of her scintillating screen presence. Embarrassing, second-banana roles in big budget English-language comedies such as Grimsby and (pardon my French) Zoolander 2 required her to stand in a cat-suit and pout. They signalled that she'd all but thrown in the towel when it came to "serious" acting. But the first half of Ma Ma reminds us of the fiery star of Jamón, Jamón and Volver. She plays the headstrong Magda, a single mother who, in the film's opening scene, chuckles defiantly when she is diagnosed with breast cancer. Though an urgent mastectomy is required, the prognosis is positive. She remains in high spirits, joking with her lovelorn doctor (Alex Brendemühl), keeping the news from her footballing ace son, and finding a sturdy leaning post in recent widower, Arturo (Luis Tosar).

Medem builds a plot around coincidence and bad fortune which almost works because of the heavy stylisation in the shooting and editing. But where the first half of the film is dashed with trauma and tragedy, it never descends into maudlin histrionics, helped no end by Cruz's confident, dryly humourous and dolefully empathetic turn. Yet there seems to have been a complete change of tack at around the half way mark, as the story divebombs into the most nauseating aria of artery-clagging sentimentality replete with CG beating heart to keep extra tabs on Magda's wavering health. Cold reason turns to cockeyed fantasy - it's like you can see the film giving up on life and staggering to a climax so horrendously misjudged that you, too, will have to check your pulse to make sure that this is actually happening. Seriously, it's like the final four of five shots of the film are at war with one another in the world cornball idiocy championships. Yet, there's enough here to suggest Medem has the eye and the nous for a big, important return after nearly a decade in the wilderness. DAVID JENKINS

ANTICIPATION. Ah, Julio Medem... he used to make great movies in the '90s.

ENJOYMENT. A hugely charismatic turn by Penélope Cruz is wasted.

IN RETROSPECT. Set an alarm for 15 minutes before the end, do a runner, thank us later.

The Trust

Directed by ALEX BREWER, BENJAMIN BREWER Starring NICOLAS CAGE, ELIJAH WOOD, JERRY LEWIS Released 13 MAY

lijah Wood spends most of *The Trust* sporting a facial expression somewhere between bemused and horrified. Considering his co-star is Nicolas Cage, master of the fabled "nouveau shamanic" acting technique, this is understandable. Take an early scene at a bar when Cage steals a lemon slice from his colleague's glass, covers it in Tabasco and chows it down. You can't help but wonder, was this written in the screenplay? But where other directors might simply let the actor run ramshod for 90 minutes, newcomers Alex and Benjamin Brewer seem to have tried pointing him in a straight line. The result is a breezy heist movie not unlike its lead actor: it might veer off the straight and narrow, but it's never dull.

Cage and Wood star as Jim Stone and David Waters, Las Vegas cops who have slipped into corruption purely by dint of being too smart to simply be incompetent. Through some off-the-books sleuthing and a series of discoveries that are never quite properly explained, they stumble upon evidence of a secret vault in the back of a convenience store which they believe to be stuffed with dirty cash. A fairly standard preparation montage (procuring tools, scouting out the location) is elevated at every turn by Cage, poring over plans with his nose covered in sunscreen, or ordering drill bits in broken German. For most of the first act, it feels Cage-lite (think his phoned-in Johnny Blaze from Ghost Rider), but the Brewers slacken his leash just enough to drive up the tension as the heist proper begins. The Trust may not break new ground in the genre, but it's a handsomely made example of a tried and tested formula. Cinematographer Sean Porter eschews the garish neon hues of the Vegas Strip for a cooler colour palate, and Reza Safinia's up-tempo score helps to keep up the pace. Crucially, it doesn't outstay its welcome. Casting Cage is a gamble, but the Brewers are wise enough to know when to walk away from the table. PHIL W BAYLES

ANTICIPATION. Nicolas Cage has five movies coming out in 2016. The law of averages says one of them has to be good...

ENJOYMENT.

Bad Lieutenant: Vegas or Bust.



IN RETROSPECT.

Cage is on fine form in this slick little thriller.



When Marnie Was There

Directed by
HIROMASA YONEBAYASHI
Starring
SARA TAKATSUKI
KASUMI ARIMURA
NANAKO MATSUSHIMA
Released
10 JUNE



ANTICIPATION.

Studio Ghibli's final film, from the director behind the very lovely Arrietty.



ENJOYMENT.

At times as awkward as its young protagonist, yet brimming with the familiar Ghibli magic.



IN RETROSPECT.

Not so much an ending, as a new beginning.

alk about a tough act to follow. Trailing behind the dual release of Hayao Miyazaki's *The Wind Rises* and Isao Takahata's *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya* by less than a year, *When Marnie Was There* is tasked with turning off the lights and lowering the shutters at Japanese animation powerhouse Studio Ghibli. Its two predecessors were monolithic statements from old masters, both intent on breaking ground in the artform they helped define. Together, they felt like a conclusion, an appropriate point to put feature film production on indefinite hiatus. Yet here is director Hiromasa Yonebayashi, picking up the mic dropped by his elders to tell one last tale.

The result is a fantasy-tinged coming-of-age melodrama adapted from a 1967 novel by British children's author Joan G Robinson. It recounts a summer friendship between Anna (asthmatic, socially awkward) and a mysterious girl she spies hanging around an abandoned waterfront mansion. Distinct from the studio's fantastical adventures, When Marnie Was There fits into one of the company's secondary genre moulds: the 'teen feels' drama, as best seen in Whisper of the Heart and From Up on Poppy Hill, both of which were written by Miyazaki as projects for protégé directors.

Yonebayashi adapts Robinson's novel himself, in collaboration with Ghibli veterans Keiko Niwa (cowriter of *Arrietty*) and Masashi Ando (an animator with credits dating back to 1991's *Only Yesterday*). Where Miyazaki found a graceful narrative flow to complement his characters' growing pains, *When Marnie Was There* is volatile and unpredictable from the off: a pleasant pre-titles sequence in a summery

schoolyard is upturned when Anna suffers an anxiety attack after an everyday social interaction goes awry. She twists herself into agonised emotional knots. The angst keeps coming, as Yonebayashi stacks melodramatic themes on top of an otherwise featherlight timeslip plot, encompassing state subsidies for foster families, burgeoning sexuality, domestic violence, mental illness and, most remarkably, mixed-race identity in Japan. It's a far cry from Miyazaki's meticulously controlled, highly sophisticated storytelling, but there's no denying the radical ambition inherent in tackling topics as yet unseen in the Ghibli canon.

Still, it often feels like Yonebayashi's attempt to decode the Studio's DNA, using Robinson's story to illuminate Miyazaki's creative relationship with nostalgia, pastoral settings and European influences. As Anna, suffocated by social pressures, boards a train to the coast, she is simultaneously reinvigorated by the seaside air, and drawn out of her shell by Marnie, the enigmatic girl-out-of-time, whose globe trotting family bring glamour to Hokkaido, with Jazz Age gatherings that recall the world of *The Wind Rises*.

While it may not be a consummate success – *Totoro*-adoring youngsters will find the slow pace tough; world cinema aficionados may feel undernourished by the blunt simplicities of its social drama – this is a strong entry in the 'Post-Ghibli' anime sub-genre. Anna and Yonebayashi look back for meaning – to the past, to the country, to simpler pleasures such as boating and letter writing – as if it were only through an acceptance of history, and an understanding of our forebears, that we can flourish. MICHAEL LEADER



We meet the director of the film widely rumoured to be Studio Ghibli's last hurrah.

iromasa Yonebayashi's When Marnie Was There is a study of teenage grief and anxiety that's leavened by Studio Ghbili's typical recourse to gentle whimsy and fantasy. The director talks to us about following up Arrietty, his 2010 take on 'The Borrowers', working with the great Hayao Miyazaki, and the value of close attention to detail.

LWLies: How do you see When Marnie Was There as relating to your previous film Arrietty? Yonebayashi: With Arrietty, because Miyazaki created the concept on the screenplay, I was always conscious of Miyazaki and how he would feel, how he would receive it. But with Marnie, what I was conscious of was purely the enjoyment of the audience. At the end of Arrietty, the borrowers leave their nest and they fly away. So for the second one, this time I thought I should be able to do it on my own.

It seems like a big decision to make an animated film that tackles subjects such as grief and depression. It was very difficult when I read the original novel, 'Marnie', by Joan G Robinson, there was so much detailed expression of Anna and Marnie. A visualisation of those words would be very difficult. But at the same time I thought that if I could succeed, it would be a very rare type of film. Anna builds a wall around her, she refuses help from the outside, but at the same time she's screaming out for it as well, and eventually she realises she's loved by the people around her and she's gradually adapting to the realities of life.

There are lot of references to Alfred Hitchcock in the film – from Vertigo to The Birds and Marnie. I wasn't particular conscious of this, but probably there is an element of suspense. It begins with the meeting of Marnie and Anna, but gradually we wonder who Marnie actually is. Referencing other movies is actually quite rare for Studio Ghibli – we haven't done it before. I think there is a psychological link to Hitchcock, and that's why you might have felt that similarity. But it wasn't intentional.

How much real photography and real film of landscapes and objects are incorporated into the animation process? I think it depends on the film, but with this one especially, the real world needed to be represented as real. Marnie exists in a fantasy and her world is idealistic. And when Marnie is not around, Anna's world has to be very realistic. Our production designer, Yohei Taneda, has lots of experience in live action films, so I asked him how to achieve that effect. We went to Hokkaido and took a lot of references of landscape, scenery and architecture

There is a sequence where Anna gets on a train at the beginning of the film – there is so much detail in how the door closes and the sounds that the trains makes. How long does a sequence like that take to animate? There are so many staff working simultaneously on that single moment, but it still took several months. Other companies would probably do it with CG, but we hand draw everything. What we expect animators to do is to embed themselves in a moment and recreate what they see. So yes, if you felt that scene was remarkable, that makes me very happy.

Films like this and Arrietty are almost like live-action movies rendered as animation. I am very happy you notice and feel that way. For instance, when Anna places her feet in the marsh water for the first time, you feel that it's cold. It is very difficult for hand drawn animation to depict or express that sensation, but it is those sort of a details are necessary for this type of film to work.

What was the first Ghibli film you ever saw and do you recall your instant reaction to it? It's maybe not strictly speaking a Ghibli film, but Nausicaä, of the Valley of the Wind, and then My Neighbour Totoro. I've been watching all of them since I was a child. I was excited by the world of Nausicaä, and then eventually I joined the Ghibli team and I was building one of these worlds for them. That was a wonder. The history of Studio Ghibli is also a history of myself, from childhood to this very moment



Where to Invade Next

Directed by
MICHAEL MOORE
Released
10 JUNE



ANTICIPATION.

Capitalism: A Love Story lacked the impact of Moore's previous efforts.



ENJOYMENT.

Relevant, cogent and funny.



IN RETROSPECT.

A shade too scattershot to stick.

've turned into this crazy optimist," confesses inexhaustible rabble-rouser Michael Moore, nearing the end of his latest righteous quest. Despite the characteristically provocative title, the new film from the daddy of modern populist documentary is not about the business of war, rather it sees the globe-trotting American staging a series of mock invasions of countries where things actually work. He's after their ideas and he's not going home empty handed.

Where to Invade Next largely focuses on the success stories of Europe, with the UK – whose NHS came in for praise in 2007's Sicko – a notable omission this time around. The filmmaker lauds the generous holiday and maternity leave of Italy, the mouth-watering school lunches of France, the compassionate attitude towards work-related stress of Germany, the decriminalisation of drugs in Portugal, the rehabilitation-based penal system of Norway (where we're told the recidivism rate is 20 per cent, compared to the US where it is 80 per cent), the gender equality of Iceland, and more.

His interviewees are cheerful and well-adjusted, if sometimes borderline smug. They are happy to play along with the premise and reserve their harshest words for the behaviour of the US itself. This upbeat effort feels a long way from Moore's bitterly personal 1989 film *Roger & Me*, or 2002's passionately polemical *Bowling for Columbine*. By focusing on the solutions rather than expounding on America's problems, Moore creates an emotional distance, one which facilitates the film's positive "look what's possible!" message. It does, however,

mean that this personable filmmaker is functioning at a remove.

The approach of cherry-picking the good but ignoring the bad also means that *Where to Invade Next* sometimes feels like a series of chipper advertisements for foreign climes. Fortunately, our guide's knowing, curmudgeonly persona acts as a counterweight to stop it soaring away, while there is mention that the benefits featured haven't come easily and that they remain precarious.

It's snappily edited and Moore's shtick is, as ever, entertaining and persuasive. With the threat of a Trump White House looming large, this list of tried and tested fixes to America's ills couldn't have come at a better time. His primary objective is undoubtedly to persuade his countrymen to embrace radical, lifeenhancing and humane reforms rather than, say, putting themselves at the mercy of a scaremongering loon. The film is, however, released in the UK a mere fortnight before the nation heads to the polls for an EU referendum, and provides a compelling argument for continuing to align ourselves with those who have apparently nailed their pursuit of happiness.

The film ironically sneers at and stereotypes its subjects, making the usual gags about French people all being cowards and Germans all bores. It then shows us who is really laughing by laying out their smart solutions and superior quality of life. The slightly odd invasion conceit and unwieldy range of issues covered means it's not quite vintage Moore, but *Where to Invade Next* spins a wealth of inspiring, actionable ideas into a rousing and – crucially – accessible call for change. **EMMA SIMMONDS**



Sing Street

Directed by
JOHN CARNEY
Starring
FERDIA WALSH-PEELO
LUCY BOYNTON
AIDAN GILLEN
Released
20 MAY



ANTICIPATION.

John Carney's latest has been acquiring super fans on the festival circuit.



ENJOYMENT.

It's a jolly old romp, but nothing more or nothing less than that.



IN RETROSPECT.

Like a tie-in soundtrack album in search of a movie.

f Bratpack deity John Hughes were alive today, you could well imagine him making a film like Sing Street, a jolly if ineffectual growing pains comedy that's liberally festooned with electro-pop chart toppers and silly jokes. Such as it is, we'll have to make do with this version by John Carney, the director who went nuclear after his hushed busking drama, Once, captured the heart of a nation back in 2007. Set in Dublin during the 1980s, at a time when anyone with even a scintilla of ambition or creativity had their sights set on moving to London, the film follows gawky schoolboy Cosmo (Ferdia Walsh-Peelo) as he decides to start a band. The sole purpose of his endeavour is to steal a kiss from the gorgeous wannabe-model, Raphina (Lucy Boynton), who loiters seductively on the steps of the house opposite his school gates.

And that's pretty much it. Carney ladles on the fond period details, back-tracked with a selection of toe-tapping ditties, and merely allows the story to go exactly where you expect it to go after about the first 10 minutes. It's a shame that Carney always shoots for the ironic or nostalgic laugh, seldom using the time and setting to actually say things about the characters. A scene in which Cosmo and his layabout muso brother Brendan (Jack Reynor) rhapsodise about the promo for Duran Duran's 'Rio' as it plays on TV is merely a chance to snicker at the white bread fancy boys in their penny loafers and shark-skin suits.

The film's best moment is a brilliant throwaway gag which unduly makes a very minor character one of the most rounded and interesting. Cosmo's band have to rehearse in the front room of his multi-instrumentalist pal Eamon (Mark McKenna), whose father is seldom home. As the band belt out another of their sickeningly melodic party bangers, we cut away to Eamon's mother sat on her bed, beaming at her son's ingenuity while revving up a vibrator. The tragedy of her sexual loneliness and the odd relationship she has with both son and husband is only allowed to register for a split second, but it's enough to imbue this character with a vibrant personal and emotional history.

Elsewhere, Carney struggles to beef up the side players: Cosmo's bickering parents, played by two greats - Aidan Gillen and Maria Doyle Kennedy - are flickering shadows rather than fleshedout beings. An increasingly fraught domestic situation appears to have no bearing on anyone, as Brendan continues to mope and Cosmo's band goes from strength to strength as family ties slowly disintegrate. The general air of levity is occasionally punctured with the odd, awkward deviation into child molesting priests and the social prison of poverty. But a rebellious, can-do spirit appears to be all that's needed to save the day. The fun, musically-driven first half gives way to less interesting teen canoodling, all before we arrive at rather a sappy, air-punching climax. It's all good, clean fun, but maybe a little too good and too clean. Plus, it's hard to get over the fact that quite a lot of the music sounds like icky X-Factor cast-offs. DAVID JENKINS



No Home Movie

Directed by
CHANTAL AKERMAN
Released
24 JUNE



ANTICIPATION.

Mixed reactions so far, but Chantal Akerman's final work demands our attention.



ENJOYMENT.

Challenging, intimate, moving. A worthy final film.



IN RETROSPECT.

We'll miss you, Chantal.

o Home Movie is haunted by two ghosts. The subject of Chantal Akerman's film is her mother, Natalia, who passed away in April 2014 at age of 86, and the director herself who died in 2015, shortly after the film's world premiere. Akerman may not have originally intended for No Home Movie to be her swansong, but there is the inescapable feeling of a chapter being closed with this film. Akerman's relationship with her mother was one of the themes that united her eclectic body of work, with Natalia being a key figure in many of her installation pieces and most memorably in her 1977 film, News From Home, to which No Home Movie feels like a companion piece.

Just as in News From Home, mother and daughter spend part of No Home Movie communicating from different continents, although this time Skype makes the interaction more direct. "I want to show that there is no distance in the world," Akerman tells her mother who, with a look of confusion, peers into her monitor. "You always have such ideas, don't you darling?" Natalia smiles back. At other times, Akerman and her mother sit across the table from one another to continue their conversation. "Tell me a story." Akerman asks of the woman who fled Poland in 1938 and survived internment in Auschwitz, where her own parents died. Even as the pair discuss the most mundane things, such as Natalia's upcoming medical appointments, or the best method of preparing potatoes, we get the sense that every moment is precious for a daughter who knows that the time she has to spend with her mother is rapidly running out.

Much of the film consists of static shots of Natalia's apartment, which is always bathed in a bright, cold light. There's a cosy kitchen, a large living room with dining area, a bedroom and a decent sized garden which appears unused. She occasionally wanders around until, later in the film, she is too weak to move. Akerman's filmmaking style has always been one of patient observation, her camera letting life play out in front of it at a natural pace. Here this approach affords us an uncomfortable intimacy with Natalia as her condition deteriorates and she slowly slips away from us. Akerman occasionally cuts to images of an arid desert landscape, filmed during a visit to Israel, or a tree being buffeted by strong winds. These interludes create a powerful sense of desolation. A nomadic soul, Akerman has said that she always defined home as being where her mother is; with Natalia gone, where could she go?

Those of us who watch No Home Movie now will see a completely different film to those who saw it before she passed away. It feels like a fitting final statement from a filmmaker who always poured herself into her work and shared so much of her life and experience with us. Reactions to her last film will likely be coloured by familiarity with her past work, but anyone who recognises that we lost one of cinema's unique and most vital artists last year will find this devastating. "Where is Chantal?" the ailing Natalia croaks in one of the film's most piercing moments. Through her extraordinary body of work, she remains by our side. PHIL CONCANNON





















Cemetery of Splendour

Directed by
APICHATPONG
WEERASETHAKUL
Starring
JENJIRA PONGPAS
BANLOP LOMNOI
JARINPATTRA RUEANGRAM
Released
17 JUNE



ANTICIPATION.

The Thai maestro's first full feature since his big Palme d'Or win in 2010.



ENJOYMENT.

A vital addition to a cogent body of work.



IN RETROSPECT.

More sedate than Uncle Boonmee, but no less radical, challenging or beguiling. ome directors would be political agitators no matter where and when they were born: lap of luxury or otherwise, they'd find out where they were needed and bring their magnifying lens there. Apichatpong Weerasethakul (aka Joe), though, doesn't seem like he'd necessarily take on the Haskell Wexler model of his own accord. He was trained at the Art Institute of Chicago, and some of his earliest (and indeed, most recent) shorts are works of pure abstraction; 1999's *Windows* will look very familiar to anyone who once plugged a video camera into a TV and then tripped out on the resulting crude 2001-climax special effects.

Circumstances, though, have dictated a different path, and context has always inflected rural blissouts. In its final title cards, 2002's Blissfully Yours reveals that one character was a Burmese migrant deported slightly thereafter; 2006's Syndromes and a Century was banned in Thailand because its final shot (of two monks playing frisbee) was deemed an insult to the dignity of Buddhism. In promoting his latest film, Cemetery of Splendour, Joe has said that this is probably his final film to be shot at home; life under the Thai military junta has finally rendered working freely a near-impossibility. Perhaps South America's jungles – lush and green enough to enable continuity with his arboreally grounded work – will be next.

First we hear the usual ambience of country creatures chirping, then incongruous mechanical grinding. Repeatedly returning to his past and his parents' profession as rural clinic doctors – a setting common to *Blissfully*, *Syndromes* and

Uncle Boonmee Who can Recall his Past Lives – Joe disturbs the location this time with an opening view from a verandah as tractors tear up the landscape. The follow-up is no more reassuring: soldiers with guns direct a camo-covered truck. This hospital is for military men whose narcolepsy erratically comes and goes, often leaving them in extended comas, which can serve as a starting metaphor for a political apparatus that's unpredictable in its activities.

Joe's regular star Jenjira Pongpas (please, call her Jen) is back once again, on call as a spirit amanuensis that helps comatose soldiers communicate with their loved ones. There is a plot, but it's typically hard to summarise; per semi-usual, there are casual encounters with amiable spirits in human form and a scene of group outdoor exercising to peppy music. The major new visual additions are the glowing tubes installed over the soldiers' beds; slowly transitioning from strong reds to intense blues and verdant greens, they're supposed to aid sleep. Positioned at equal distances from each other, they're an eerily shaded internal forest analogous to the one outside.

One jolt is entirely new to Joe's stylistic lexicon: while eating lunch in the canteen area, Jen sees a soldier who, immediately after praising the food, slumps straight into his plate in a sudden attack of the sleeping sickness; the suddenness and loudness of the impact he makes is almost a shock scare. The final shot of Jen's unaccountably spooked face is the look of a victim still processing; beneath this film's typically warm and relaxing atmosphere, a national and political crisis is more angrily apparent than ever. VADIM RIZOV



The Thai master from the little town of Khon Kaen on the movies and directors that inspired him.

emetery of Splendour layers up dream states and ghostly realms – something that Thai director Apichatpong Weerasethakul does rather well. Here we talk about his formative inspirations and his deep love of genre cinema.

LWLies: Do you remember the first film you saw? Apichatpong: Yes, I don't remember the story, but I remember a shot. It was a Thai movie, an action movie with helicopters over the sea. The bad guys were on the helicopter, throwing a lot of bank notes into the sea. They looked like birds.

Cinema can often become even more multisensory in the memory. Absolutely. It's about freedom too, the freedom that comes with cinema. I felt suffocated in that little town, so films can be liberating, a way of opening up a space. Looking back on when I was growing up, I'm surprised that I could endure the system of education. You have to stand up at eight in the morning to sing the national anthem. There were so many things you had to memorise. It was like a prison.

They also play the national anthem in the cinema before every movie. There's a cinema scene in your new film Cemetery of Splendour, where everyone stands but the screen is blank. That's kind of tribute to our old cultural habits. This is just one of them, but there are countless codes that we have to follow. It comes into conflict when you make movies, especially as I think movies are about freedom. Not only that, but when you get to travel with a film and take it to film festivals, it's then that you realise what a crazy world you come from. When I went to Chicago in 1994 – I was 24 – it was such a shock, it was like travelling into the future.

What was it that turned you onto making movies? It was Spielberg. Raiders of the Lost Ark, ET and Close Encounters were really important to me. I didn't think it'd be possible, but I just wanted to be involved in some way. When I discovered experimental cinema in Chicago, I found that a better fit with my nature – very personal, and something I could do by myself, in a darkroom, with a small group of people.

What lessons do you think you took from watching all those Spielberg movies that you applied to your own films later? It was about the drama. Spielberg revived the old-style classic Hollywood drama, the way he moved the camera, it's all very melodramatic. As a kid you were able to get it straight away, it wasn't complex but it was very powerful.

He really is a master manipulator. Absolutely. When I was 12 or 15 it was just perfect. I'm a big fan of Al. I was already making films by that point and was a little disappointed. I really like War of the Worlds though, it's so grim and hopeless. Apart from the ending, there's just so much fear and paranoia.

What have you seen recently? I saw Mountains May Depart and The Forbidden Room, which were amazing. I saw The Martian too. I'm really into science and science fiction, so I'd read the book before. I was a bit disappointed as so much was cut out.

Did you see Interstellar? Twice!

What did you think? I liked the beginning [laughs]. It wasn't as good the second time.

What is it about science fiction that you find so appealing? It goes back to when I was a kid, so not something I can really explain. I liked a lot of supernatural stories and folk tales too, and science fiction feels like another kind of folk tale, the way it's about the imagination and the invisible rather than the everyday. Ghosts and spaceships have the same effect.

Weren't you planning a sci-fi movie at one point? That was a really ambitious project called Utopia, but it was too expensive. It was set in the future, but the future according to old science fiction literature. It was a kind of retro-future set in a snowy landscape in the US. I wanted to have the Starship Enterprise stuck up a mountain, but it turns out it was a set. I wanted to have all the old sci-fi actresses playing scientists, moving in and out of the fiction and reality of making those films





Troublemakers: The Story of Land Art

Directed by JAMES CRUMP Released 13 MAY

ow do you document someone else's art in a way that does it justice? Art historian Germano Celant neatly sums up the paradox: "Photography never represents the object. It is yours, not the artist's. But at the same time, you have to talk about [the art]. If you don't, what will happen in 100 years?" Enter James Crump and his film Troublemakers: The Story of Land Art, which explores the Land Art movement that emerged in the US during the '60s and '70s. Celant has a point. Can works like Spiral Jetty, a 1,500-foot coil of rock jutting out into Utah's Great Salt Lake, ever look as impressive on a screen? Editor Nick Tamburri's splicing of archive footage and sweeping aerial video certainly comes close. However, Crump chooses to focus on the artists themselves: nomads who wandered into the desert to make works which would last for centuries. Crump doesn't descend into outright hagiography, but he goes to great pains to make us aware of his admiration for the likes of Robert Smithson, Walter De Maria and Michael Heizer. He brings plenty of backup: critics, contemporaries and financiers line up to swap stories and impart reverential praise on the daring and genius of these rebel artists. Yet their motivations remain frustratingly unclear.

Land Art is not new. Its roots can be found in Stonehenge and the Nazca Lines of ancient Peru. But the movement was born at a time of huge political upheaval. The space race instilled a sense of unbridled optimism in the American people, even as the Vietnam War sapped it away. While the opening touches lightly on the broad historical context, the film does relatively little to explain the condition of the art world at that time. Exactly who, or what, were Smithson and co rebelling against? Perhaps it's better to view *Troublemakers* not as a documentary, but a cinematic to-do list. The 'Spiral Jetty', De Maria's 'Lightning Field' in New Mexico, Heizer's 'Double Negative' in the Nevada desert – Crump can show us these pieces exist, but will it ever compare to seeing them for ourselves? **PHIL W BAYLES**

ANTICIPATION. Another art advocacy doc... always worth a watch though.

3

ENJOYMENT. An intriguing look at a creatively charged period of art history.

3

IN RETROSPECT. More context would be useful for the art dunces in the room.



Learning to Drive

Directed by ISABEL COIXET
Starring PATRICIA CLARKSON, BEN KINGSLEY,
GRACE GUMMER
Released 10 JUNE

There's an argument to be made that Patricia Clarkson should be in every movie that drops off the production line. If not every movie, then at least more filmmakers should take advantage of her effortless on-screen magnetism and easy maternal charm. She is one of those actors who is best at playing Patricia Clarkson (or derivatives thereof), but we give Bill Murray a pass for doing just that, so why not Patty? Here she plays a softly-spoken and somewhat jittery literary critic who arrives at a crossroads in her life when her husband decides to break off their marriage. Luckily for her, he announces his intentions while sat in the back of a cab being driven by Ben Kingsley's Darwan, a one-time asylum seeker who works day and night to makes ends meet. In the daylight hours he plies his trade as a driving instructor, and Clarkson's distraught Wendy is fondly coerced into becoming his student as a way of confronting her fear of the road.

The film is lightness and fluff incarnate, a breezy almost-romance with a squelchy side order of liberal outrage. While Wendy analyses the reasons for her split and tries to make embarrassing amends with her soon-to-be ex-husband, Darwan is subject to racial profiling, street attacks and even an arranged marriage, all of which he balefully takes on the chin, eternally thankful for having been granted American citizenship. The public abuse is laid on strong, with director Isabel Coixet and screenwriter Sarah Kernochan apparently believing that all those sitting outside their small central circle of characters is a violent, bigoted paranoiac who thinks that immigrants are out to slaughter you and your family. Overly cute though they are, the film's finest moments are the lessons, in which Darwan's teaching method encompasses dropping all manner of Zen-like wisdom bombs. It helps that Clarkson and Kingsley make for such a darling central pairing. DAVID JENKINS

ANTICIPATION. Isabel Coixet is not really known as a safe pair of hands.

2

ENJOYMENT. A film that glides entirely on the charisma of its performers.

3

IN RETROSPECT. Very sweet when it's not being unnecessarily outraged.

3





Bang Gang (A Modern Love Story)

Directed by EVA HUSSON
Starring MARILYN LIMA, DAISY BROOM,
FINNEGAN OLDFIELD
Released 10 JUNE

his first feature by French director Eva Husson attempts to offer an insider's view of modern adolescence. And it partly succeeds for its first two acts. As term time ticks down to its final minutes, *la saison des amours* begins for a bunch of hopped-up high school students. Bored by the their middle class residential suburb, which is situated on the coast of Southwestern France, they start collecting one-night stands with one another. Matters notch up a level when George (Marilyn Lima) adapts the rules of the traditional party game Spin the Bottle to get one of the boys' attention, transforming innocent frolics into a giant teens-only gang bang.

There's social pressure to enter the game, but consent is not the issue here, nor is the lack of confidence typical for adolescents. The dialogue employs lots of modern slang which shows Husson's desire to meticulously describe - without judging - a generation brought up with internet porn and dating apps. It results in a nicely sustained balance: characters are too beautiful to be authentic, but still credible in their excessive sexual desires. But is it enough just to keep up with these kids until their story reaches its climax and enters into a moralistic downward spiral? Visually speaking, the film directly quotes its influences: Sofia Coppola's sense of empathy but without the style, and Larry Clark's elegantly wasted youths, but without the extreme provocation. But there are also some interesting and genuine ideas, like the way Husson multiplies our points of view by mixing between the musical soundtrack and the actors' heavy breathing, as well as alternating between short, artificially staged sequences and longer takes that are more dialogue driven. Visually, there's an ambivalence towards the subjects, like they're specimens more than real people. French culture mag 'Les Inrockuptibles' tried to whip the film up as a "big bang" for French teen movies on a more international scale, but in this case, the new student hasn't surpassed the American masters of the genre. MATHILDE DUMAZET

ANTICIPATION. First feature, provocative subject. A French teen-movie grown from American roots.

3

ENJOYMENT. Enough points of view are described to let you decide where to stand, morally.

0

IN RETROSPECT. A bit too superficial in its conclusions on modern adolescence to be remembered.

Directed by STEFANO SOLLIMA
Starring PIERFRANCESCO FAVINO, ELIO GERMANO,
CLAUDIO AMENDOLA
Released 24 JUNE

Suburra

eheated gangster shenanigans in which we see lots of awful people being awful, Stefano Sollima's *Suburra* strains very hard to offer a new twist on material that's as old as mama's ragu recipe. He mainly does this by throwing on the dreamy M83 track 'Outro' during the film's quiet, reflective moments as a way to impose a sense of dreamy bombast. It's an example of crass designer pessimism, where everything that can go wrong does so, and everything is shown as being relative to a forthcoming "apocalypse". A crooked politician accidentally kills a prostitute during a drug orgy, but is only interested in disposing of the corpse and retaining his professional dignity. When petty hoods start bribing him, he instigates a tit-for-tat gang war, the big side-pot being the chance to turn the sleepy seaside port of Ostia into Italy's answer to Las Vegas.

Props to Sollima for being able to juggle so many characters (plotwise this is just the tip of the iceberg), but it does mean that stereotypes are leaned on heavily and often. There's the tart with a heart, the weedy businessman, the psychotic hood, plus the Gypsy family who are worryingly painted as corpulent, tasteless and violent fools. At the centre of it all is Claudio Amendola's ageing mobster known as Samurai, whose old guard status affords him a grudging respect from his trigger-happy peers. And yet, the film has no real centre, shifting back and forth between disparate plot strands and offers the viewer no-one who we really wouldn't like to see whacked out at the nearest convenience. The director earned his spurs in television, spinning off Matteo Garrone's Cannes-lauded *Gomorrah* for the small screen, and if you didn't know that fact, you could've probably detected it from watching *Suburra* – it's all surface sheen and precious little depth. DAVID JENKINS

ANTICIPATION. TV's Gomorrah heads to the big screen. Sort of...

3

ENJOYMENT. It's all strung together with an admirable professionalism.

3

IN RETROSPECT. *Might as well be titled* Misc Gangster Film #78253.

2



Everybody Wants Some!!

Directed by RICHARD LINKLATER Starring **BLAKE JENNER** TYLER HOECHLIN **GLEN POWELL** Released



13 MAY

ANTICIPATION.

How could he possibly top Boyhood, one of the great films of the 21st century?



ENJOYMENT.

A marvel. Conjures profound movie poetry out of the dust.



IN RETROSPECT.

The race for 'best film of 2016' starts right here.

hat a beautiful notion it is that people can look up into the night sky and form pictures by joining together the stars. The kids these days are calling them constellations, but the process of training focus on the bounty of nature and forging an artwork in the mind is rather a cinematic gesture. The fact that Ursa Minor looks nothing like a little bear, or The Big Dipper bares scant resemblance to... whatever a big dipper is supposed to be, is moot. They're basic formations around which we can mentally impose an image, just as movies - particularly good movies - are packages of information that we must interpret, expand upon and unpack.

We mention the stars because they feature heavily in Richard Linklater's sweet, salty and stunning new feature, Everybody Wants Some!!. It's a work he's long been billing as the "spiritual sequel" to his iconic 1993 party movie, Dazed and Confused, and it fits that highfalutin bill. It takes place over a long weekend in 1980, chronicling the booze-fuelled monkeyshines of a fraternity house filled with baseball scholars. The film ends as the new semester starts. Decked out in ball-hugging slacks and bicep-brandishing tees, the motley crew daisy chain together various leisure activities. They talk, they drink, they spin records, they smooth with girls, they ride mattresses down a staircase and they get into all manner of violent barroom sports contests. Their all-American dudebro intimacy and colourful patter makes them feel like they've been air-lifted in from a Vietnam war movie. Although parties make up much of the plotline, they are details more than the central subject. They're a hotbed of frivolous fun, an outlet for more base expressions, such as mud wrestling. If the stars are pristine and finite, these are the supernovas - glorious to observe, but only from a safe distance.

Talking of stars, they make their first appearance in the Shakespearean sense, as our hyper-mellow hero, Jake (Blake Jenner), is spotted in the back seat of a car by Zoey Deutch's drama sophomore, Beverly. Though the two don't actually speak, he makes a mental note of where she lives, even deflecting the jocular taunts of his housemates to watch as she enters her dorm room. The pair don't meet again until much later in the film, but their paths have crossed and their fate is sealed. There's a moment later in the film where Glen Powell's moustachioed cad, Finnegan, attempts to flirt with a girl by pretending he's interested in his astrological star sign. She almost doesn't see through him, but prying ears are on hand to ask why he has chosen to shelve his customary, groinbased chat-up line. Maybe this is Linklater saying that we should look to the stars for images, but maybe not for meaning. And especially not parlay that meaning into a phoney confessional.

The baseball diamond itself is the final

constellation - the immovable grid through which balls and bodies fly. Everybody Wants Some!! contains a single scene of baseball being played, and it is perhaps one of the most majestic and lyrical ever captured on film. Linklater doesn't strain for effect, or attempt to make the game look artificial through camera trickery or overly-artful framing. The sequence is at once functional and musical, one to be studied and pored over. It is a ballet which couples cosmic imagery with the clear-cut partition between blue skies and green fields. Linklater explored questions of human evolution in his previous feature, Boyhood, and does so again here, albeit in a more abstract manner.

It's also a film that confounds expectation, brilliantly challenging the cliché that scholarly life is governed by a rigid cultural caste system. Indeed, it practices what it preaches, showing how easy it is for punks to mix with jocks, jocks with thesps, freshmen with seniors, and everyone with a selfimportant, goggle-eyed dingus named Jay Niles (Juston Street). Life is just one big circle-pit of nostalgic bonhomie. Political antagonism is a state of mind. This film is a flower in the gun barrel of conservative bigotry and arrogance. It's about the subtle joy of making - not breaking - connections.

If we, at this point, alter the settings on our long range telescopes, we can also see that Linklater's cinematic back catalogue has begun to form its own dazzling and complex constellation. Although its closest kinship is with Dazed..., you can see elements of Everybody Wants Some!! in many of his other titles: the countercultural city symphony of Slacker; the romantic hypothesising of the Before trilogy; the sincere worship of FM radio stompers in School of Rock; the pop metaphysics of Waking Life; there's even a link to the chest-bumping camaraderie of The Newton Boys and Bad News Bears. It's breathtaking what Linklater is doing, this shape he is building. What's more gratifying is that, once this structure is finished, people might look at it and see different things. All we can say at this point is... batter up! DAVID JENKINS







Richard Linklater

LWLies steps up to the plate with the writer/director of the sensational Everybody Wants Some!!

he last time we spoke to Richard Linklater, shortly after he introduced *Boyhood* to his adoring hometown crowd at the 2014 South by Southwest Film Festival, he casually dropped a bombshell. It turned out that one of the most celebrated filmmakers of his generation never saw a career in the movies for himself. At least not in his college days. Back then, baseball was his true passion, and it's this great American pastime that informs Linklater's latest home run, *Everybody Wants Somel!*, which follows the pre-season shenanigans of a college team in Austin circa 1980. We caught up with the writer/director to talk first loves and male bonding.

LWLies: When did you fall in love with baseball? Linklater: For as long as I can remember I wanted to be a baseball player. From about age 12 to 20 it was my biggest single focus. And then, when I left college, that dream ended. I changed direction and it went from meaning everything to almost nothing. But now I look back at various stages of my life and there it is, this big backdrop. I think you're lucky if when you're young you have something like that to focus on. It keeps you healthy mentally. You know, I went through my own adolescent existential crisis just like everyone else, but I always had baseball to look forward to, to work towards, to be a part of something.

Were you encouraged by your parents to pursue it? Well my dad was an athlete, although he played football not baseball, so I grew up around sport. He said he lobbed me up a little plastic ball once when I was like three years old and I had a bat and I knocked the ball over the house. He said I could just always hit. I had the right upper body shape for it I guess. I wouldn't say I was born to do it or anything but, you know, it was always in me.

What impact did guys like Ray Knoblauch, who coached you in high school, have on you growing up? Ray was this legendary coach – won national coach of the year a couple times – but really he was just one of many coaches that I learned from. He was an interesting person to be around, but I wouldn't say he was any better than some of the others. A coach I learned more from was Steve Kerr, who was much more relaxed and kind of funny. A lot of the coaches from my era were war veterans and they were pretty tough. It was the old school where you yelled at players. Steve was one of the first coaches who would help you relax and put you at ease on the plate. The coach I admire the most these days is Augie Garrido, who runs the University of Texas team. He's someone I didn't personally play for but in a way he's helped me more than any of those other coaches.

In what way? He worked as a consultant on this movie and spent a solid morning with the guys. I really dialled into how he coaches. He's just an inspiring guy to be around. He's in his seventies now and he has the distinction in all of college sports history to have the most wins. But his whole philosophy is not so much about winning but taking things moment by moment. The wins will take care of themselves.

Were you ever part of a winning team? Oh sure, my college coach John Skeeters led us to a 40 game winning season one year. We got beat in the playoffs but it was definitely the best team I played on.

What are you reflections on that period in your life? I remember digging out an old team photo a few years ago and my daughter asked me if I could name everyone in the picture. I said, 'Name them? I could tell you everything about them! What high-school they went to, what position they played, everything.' I think if you've ever played sports, if you've ever been part of a team – I'm talking male, female, all over the map – then you'll understand what I'm trying to capture in this movie. That group dynamic and camaraderie and bonding and the scapegoating and the humour...

So how do you capture that on film? It's a lot like putting a sports team together – you get the best players, they all play their roles. All the guys had played sports, they all were good athletes. That was part of their casting conditions to a large degree. It was really about getting them to buy in. There's a thing in all team sports which I think is true of acting as well, which is that it's easy to be selfish, to want more for yourself. But these guys immediately knew that they were there for the team, to make a good film. That's the team that wins, the one that gets together and decides everyone is going to pull in the same direction.

There's an amazing scene where you actually get to see the guys on the practice field. I think it was important to actually see them for all their bluster and all their energy. You see it in offshoot, sidebar kind of ways, the arch competitiveness they all seem to have. But it was important to actually show how good these guys are as well. That this is a real team. You know, they don't even have a coach there, they're there on their own but there's a real sense that they know what they're doing. There's a routine, there's leadership there and they're serious. They care, you know. So to see all that really helps bond them, I think, and storytelling wise it pays off a lot of little lines that have been building to that moment.



Fire at Sea

Directed by
GIANFRANCO ROSI
Released
10 JUNE



ANTICIPATION.

Gianfranco Rosi's second festival winner on the trot.



ENJOYMENT.

Mixes political and observational documentary to profound effect.



IN RETROSPECT.

A major step-up from the quaint Sacro GRA.

hey say that when you're purchasing a house, you should wait until the weather is neither rainy nor sunny. That way it won't colour your assessment of the property before you hand over obscene amounts of money for it. In his 2013 Venice prize-winner, Sacro GRA, about the diversity of life concected by a Roman ring road, and this new film, about the sorry lot of African refugees passing through Italian waters, the skies - like the director - remain defiantly neutral. Fire at Sea takes place on the craggy, stepping-stone island of Lampedusa which sits almost exactly half way between the Libyan capital of Tripoli and Sicily. Fishing is the island's main industry, though that noble tradition is slowly being usurped. Boats are now used to assist the dangerously jam-packed rafts transporting those fleeing oppressive African regimes in search of a better life in Europe.

This is a political advocacy doc, but under a more artful guise. The horrendous conditions on these rickety rafts show that those willing to board have been left with no other choice. Hearing about the places from which they're escaping, the risk becomes more rational. They know the odds of surviving the voyage are slim, but it's a gamble they absolutely must take. Rosi films a refugee cataloguing the abuses he's endured in the form of a rousing prayer-chant, and it's a scene which succinctly captures the horrifying context of the so-called "migrant crisis" while criticising the misdirected indignation of the west.

As with Sacro GRA, Rosi takes great pains to fuse subject with landscape. The elaborate seabound

rescue missions are viewed as incidental to the life of errant schoolboy, Samuele, who's presented as a carefree Dennis the Menace-type searching for ways to kill time. The film's opening shot observes as he inelegantly scales a small tree to collect a branch that he can fashion into a catapult. With a pal, he then fires shards of slate into fat cactus leaves, taping them back up before wending his way home for tea. You might think that watching Samuele's attempts to lighten his fairly mundane existence (the Chaplin-esque manner in which he eats spaghetti is a joy to behold) would bring some levity to the material, but the opposite is true. The film isn't about Samuele, nor is it about the refugees, it's about how these two words are subtly adjoined. Even though Lampedusa is a place where little actually happens, Samuele remains blissfully unaware that death and hardship are but a stone's throw away.

Without hectoring, pleading or instructing, the film uses this small (though highly pertinent) case study to examine the boundless breadth of human experience and the impossibility of calculating the inner-torment of our fellow man. It celebrates individuality and shows how easy it is to take tranquil stability for granted. Fire at Sea feels like a distant but crisp echo of Vittorio De Sica's 1948 neorealist classic, Bicycle Thieves. It asks whether we have become desensitised to political atrocities. It also asks whether innocence is a possible state of being in a society where extreme suffering is always hovering in our collective blind spot.



Maggie's Plan

Directed by
REBECCA MILLER
Starring
GRETA GERWIG
ETHAN HAWKE
JULIANNE MOORE
Released
8 JULY



ANTICIPATION.

What an excellent cast!



ENJOYMENT.

Greta Gerwig and Julianne Moore are having the best time.



IN RETROSPECT.

It's fun in the moment, but too throwaway to last.

uthor and filmmaker Rebecca Miller reflects on relationships, parenthood and all the messy stuff that come with them in this light, fast-paced romantic comedy set in the world of high academia. She pits choice against fate on issues of the heart and the outcome is an enjoyably quirky though somewhat detached exploration of the many frustrations of modern love. Maggie (Greta Gerwig) declares to her best friend Tony (Bill Hader) that she wants to have a baby through artificial insemination as they stroll through a Brooklyn food market. Tony, a father in a long-term relationship with Felicia (Maya Rudolph), whose young son sports an oversized "Imagine there's no fracking" badge, gently mocks her request. She explains that none of her relationships last, so she might as well take care of business on her own.

Miller is aware of and comfortable with the middle-class ennui she portrays. It's often preposterous, and she fully embraces that. She also pokes fun at academic chitchat and ultra-competitiveness between ficto-critical anthropology professor John (Ethan Hawke) and his super successful wife Georgette (Julianne Moore). When Maggie bumps into John in the university office over a pay cheque mishap, the two become friends and embark on an affair which in turn ends his marriage. But the story has only just begun at this point, with the viewer being brought forward three years to the point where Maggie realises John may not be the man for her. At the peak of her exasperation she asks, "Am I so capable I don't deserve any attention?" Then John

begins another long phone call with his ex-wife on the finer points of the novel that he and Maggie initially bonded over. Instead of simply leaving him, she formulates a plan that she believes will make everyone happy.

Contempt for the self-absorbed male writer was superbly handled in Alex Ross Perry's 2014 film, *Listen Up Philip*. Lina Wolff's 2016 novel, 'Bret Easton Ellis and the Other Dogs,' also covered similar frustrations in the literary world, but where these take the form of scathing and witty reprisals, Miller takes a more frivolous tack and laughs at the absurdity of it all. Her world, by design, is populated entirely with caricatures, yet unlike the work by Perry and Wolff, Maggie is selfless rather than self important.

Despite the gameness and joviality of an impressive ensemble cast, Miller doesn't dive deep enough when it comes to locating profound insight in her characters' psyches. The actors are clearly having the time of their lives and, in the moment, their interactions are a delight to behold. Plus, the platonic dynamic between Maggie and Tony is wonderfully observed. What Maggie's Plan lacks in nuance, however, it makes up for with some inspired, invigorating comic moments, including one particularly amusing punk-rock cameo. This film marks a continuation of themes originally explored in Miller's previous, The Private Lives of Pippa Lee: the nobility of a female's emotional journey and the affect that self-sacrificing ways can have on both inner and outer life. KATHERINE MCLAUGHLIN



Embrace of the Serpent

Directed by
CIRO GUERRA
Starring
NILBIO TORRES
JAN BIJVOET
ANTONIO BOLIVAR
Released
10 JUNE



ANTICIPATION.

Ciro Guerra's first two features were terrific.



ENJOYMENT.

This was never going to win the Oscar.



IN RETROSPECT.

An exquisitely rendered study of colonialism, memory and cultural erasure.

olonialism and memory serve as the twin forces steadily erasing an entire cultural heritage on this slow-burn journey down the Amazon. It's a film pregnant with mystical symbolism. And its complex structure ends up being the key to deciphering its meaning. Director Ciro Guerra weaves together two narratives, one from the turn of the 20th century, the other taking place some 40 years later; each is a fictionalised account of a search by a pair of real-life German ethnographers for the film's elusive MacGuffin, the yakruna plant, said to possess hallucinogenic, mind-expanding properties.

Uniting the two narrative strands is a character slowly revealed as our guide, Karamakate, seemingly the last surviving member of the Cohiuano tribe. Karamakate is played by two actors - as a young and older man. His presence bridges the two eras with an unreliable subjectivity. He looks down on the western white men in his company, failing to differentiate between them. He is what he refers to as a "Chullachaqui," a spectre of his former self. "We all have one," he says. "It looks like you, but is empty, hollow, a ghost without time."

With the help of screenwriter Jacques Toulemonde Vidal, Guerra crafts a rich thematic allegory on the effects of colonialism. It takes the form of a serpentine dance through time, sounding a series of echoes beyond the immediate horrors borne of its Conradian heart of darkness. And horrors there are plenty, not least in scenes at an orphanage populated by sadistic missionaries and a Colonel

Kurtz-like demagogue in each respective timeframe.

Guerra's movement between eras (in one stunning instance, without the use of a cut) exposes the festering wounds of colonialism. David Gallego's rich, monochrome super-35 cinematography accentuates the oppressive and the beautiful. Open spaces take on a claustrophobic quality, heightened by Karamakate's increasing disconnection. If, on occasion, the screenplay spells out its thematic motifs, as in an episode with a missing compass ("You cannot forbid them to learn!") or a trading of creation myths (featuring Haydn's, um, 'Creation'), Guerra continually leads with his images. An extraordinary opening credit sequence of a snake feasting on its young is impossibly bettered by a late, subtextuallyweighted jaguar versus serpent attack.

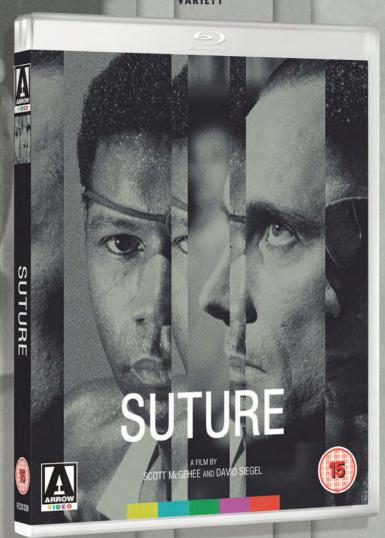
Yet what takes hold long after the credits have rolled is a final sequence at the end of the expedition. The discovery of the last yakruna plant, shared with the later explorer, explodes into a metaphysical kaleidoscope of colour, its mind-expanding irruptions channelling the stargate set-piece at the end of Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey. Where that film's wormhole charted a course through the folded fabric of space to question the affects of the extra- on the terrestrial, Guerra pulls off a coup that bears the weight of comparison well. Punching a hole between its twin points in time, the film lays bare the destructive force of modern man on his environment. Nature itself finally offers up a vision of enlightenment, albeit one that's too late for salvation. MATT THRIFT



"Superbly written, excellently acted and coolly brilliant"

"A witty, imaginative noir thriller"

"Exceedingly smart and elegant"



A THRILLER WHERE NOTHING IS BLACK AND WHITE

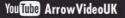
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Evolution

Directed by **LUCILE HADZIHALILOVIC** Starrina MAX BREBANT **ROXANE DURAN** JULIE-MARIE PARMENTIER Released 6 MAY



ANTICIPATION.

Comparisons to Under the Skin have been made.



ENJOYMENT.

Too sensual for words.



IN RETROSPECT.

A nightmare that looks like a dream.

volution is sensual cinema. Lucile Hadzihalilovic's second feature evokes the perspective of a child who cannot translate the strangeness of the world into words. Analysing this film with any sense of authority is a doomed endeavour. Better just to describe it.

It is comparable to Jonathan Glazer's Under the Skin in that everyone will interpret the 'story' in a different way. A more communal experience will be the appreciation of Manuel Dacosse's sumptuous photography. The colours are almost too saturated to be real - and yet the settings evoke all that is glorious about the natural world. After 90 minutes of such heady beauty in colour and composition, anecdotal findings would suggest that people depart from the cinema in the altered state of a swoon.

Nicolas (Max Brebant) is a tiny slip of a tanned boy with big brown eyes and small red swimming trunks. He lives on an island with equally small boys and their strikingly pale mothers. There are no adult men anywhere. The film opens with coverage of the island's clear surrounding waters, white foam collecting as the waves crash into rocks with a crackling hiss that rings in your ears. Thomas dives into the calmer, deeper blue and finds what seems to be a dead boy of his age. His mother dives in after and brings back only a red starfish.

What follows is virtually dialogue-free world building. Everyone on the island lives in spartan conditions. Homes contain tables, chairs and beds. Meals consist of a slimy seaweed-like substance washed down with a few pipettes of delicious iodine.

Hadzihalilovic's stately pacing creates a feeling of relaxation tinged with adrenaline. Something eerie is unfolding, one perfect image at a time.

There are elements of science fiction, body horror and coming-of-age drama at play. Fabiola Ordoyo's sound design is incredible: squelchy, precise and echoing. Nicolas is a stoical little boy, reacting to strange rooms and even stranger events with sad-eyed pragmatism. In his acceptance of nightmarish circumstances is something of the real world burden of knowledge that accompanies growing up. Conversely, the specifics of his burdens are surreally and viscerally inventive. The combination of the familiar with pure otherness creates a mesmerising atmosphere.

Images and themes recur: stars; the colour red; starched medical procedures; goo; bodies; the metronomic robot beat of the mothers' footsteps. The deeper you go (if you accept the film's non-narrative power), the more you're able to abandon your logical faculties. On the surface there are basic stakes to entertain: Nicolas is the hero and he is in peril. There is a selfless angel on his side. Events feel predestined. Very little is explained. Many characters are defined by alien, Pre-Raphaelite looks. The ending offers a comparative landslide of information in terms of enabling a read of what the film is all about, but even that is very abstract. What makes Evolution unforgettable is not its story, but the seductive pull of its carnal language and what that means for a young boy who can't help but lose his innocence.

SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN



Notes on Blindness

Directed by
JAMES SPINNEY,
PETER MIDDLETON
Starring
JOHN HULL
DAN SKINNER
SIMONE KIRBY
Released
1 JULY



ANTICIPATION.

Britain jumps on the doc-fiction hybrid train.



ENJOYMENT.

Technically accomplished, but dramatically a little lightweight.



IN RETROSPECT.

A mature, respectable, gently moving discussion that lacks a killer hook.

ow to make a movie which amply articulates the physical experience of blindness? It's a toughie, for sure, but directors James Spinney and Peter Middleton have had a damn good crack at it, their atmospheric feature debut bringing a taped confessional to life with suitably ambient visuals. Mild-mannered, bushy-bearded theologian and family man John Hull lost his sight after a lifetime of occular ailments. He documents his efforts to remain a working academic, a father, a son, a husband and a valuable member of society. Calmly methodical in his approach, he troubleshoots his way through this frightening new phase of his life and offers sound reasoning for his actions and his gently fluctuating psychological state.

A decision has been made to dramatise the audio, with actors playing the parts of John and his wife, Marilyn. They lip-synch along to recorded monologues and conversations, creating a ghostly disconnect between past and present. It's an odd gambit that doesn't entirely pay off. In a film about impairment and the feeling of having to muddle along and fill in blanks, the film too often tells rather than shows. There's lovely sequence near the end in which John accompanies his toddler son to school. They rebound calls of "bye!" to one another as he enters the playground so John can hear that he's reached the front gate safely. We see it happening, and we also hear John describing it, which kinda ruins the moment. It's sensory overcompensation.

Dan Skinner's plaintive and subtly expressive turn as Hull prevents the film from descending into full-bore melodrama, but it does in turn invent a character and a personal history which it tries to pass off as fact. When we see a "real" convesation dramatised by actors, that element of reality is recontextualised and altered. It combines documentary and fiction, but feels more like it aspires towards fiction and is weighed back by its documentary baggage. It wants the drama of fiction and the integrity of documentary. At the same time, maybe Spinney and Middleton are trying to emphasise the unreliablity of vision, that the act of seeing can be defined in different ways. A similarly inclined film such as Edward Lovelace and James Hall's *The Possibilities Are Endless* from 2014, on musician and stroke victim, Edwyn Collins, strikes that balance a lot more cleanly.

Hull, meanwhile, is level-headed, stoical and articulate to the extent that it's never in question of whether he'll eventually transcend his torturous predicament. Emotional volatility is, sadly, notable by its absence. The film's most fascinating aspect is how Hull's affliction contends with his religious beliefs, though it's treated as a sub-theme at best. It's especially interesting given his occupation, though the film retains its attention on the practicle rather than the philosophical or poetic dimensions of the subject.

Despite the valuable work he has done to raise awareness of blindness, it's questionable whether there's enough of a story here for a full feature. "To gain our full humanity, blind people and sighted people need each other," is the affirmative and profound expression which runs prior to the closing credits. Noble in its intentions and innovative in its execution, the film acts as a lugubrious prelude to that quotation. DAVID JENKINS



Mustang

Directed by **DENIZ GAMZE ERGÜVEN** Starrina **GÜNES SENSOY DOGA ZEYNEP DOGUSLU ILAYDA AKDOGAN** Released **13 MAY**



ANTICIPATION.

Massive buzz, including a tweet from superfan Andie MacDowell.



ENJOYMENT.

Rich with cinematic contradictions: joyful but tragic; gorgeous but ugly. A realistic fairy tale.



IN RETROSPECT.

Urgently political and rapturously artistic.

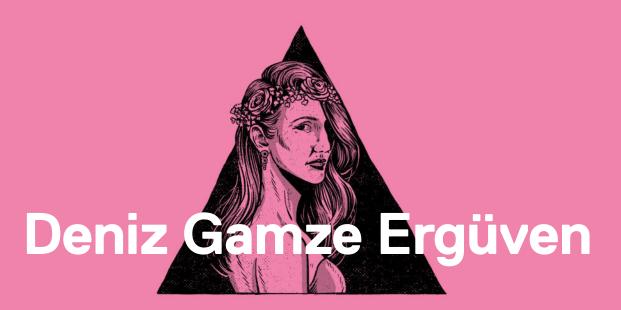
efore Mustang received an Academy Award nomination, when all anyone had to go on was an opaque title, the film was being sold as, 'a Turkish Virgin Suicides.' The logline is irresistible. for there are numerous surface similarities to Sofia Coppola's 1999 debut feature. Both pivot around five sisters, all with long hair that glints in the sun. They are so close-knit that they appear as a five-headed mass of limbs and laughter. The darkness that slowly encroaches on youthful freedom is also the same, taking the form of a fear of female sexuality. The scene in which the girls' weary grandmother locks up all their colourful gadgets and playthings is a direct homage.

Like the Lisbon sisters before them, these five surname-less orphans look like miniature princesses. They radiate fairytale femininity, looking picturesque even as their dialogue grounds them in irreverent sibling banter. Mustang steps out from any comparative shadow by virtue of the gripping specificity of the narrative. The tools with which a fearsome patriarch oppresses and imprisons the girls are rooted in the formative experiences of director, Deniz Gamze Ergüven. While the shape and pitch of the story could be the shape and pitch of any story where men trample over women, Mustang is rooted in rural Turkey, here represented as a confusingly idyllic village next to the Black Sea.

The girls enjoy an opening that is free from the strictures of gender norms in this time and place, but, through the shocked reactions of family and neighbours alike, Ergüven makes it clear that it's dangerous to want a full and rich life when you happen to have been born female. What makes Mustang so affecting is the vivacity with which the girls are shown enjoying their freedom, despite the threatening spectre of the powers-that-be. A water fight in the sea and an illicit trip to a football match are soaked in joy. The giddy abandon of youthful pleasures are writ large across blissed-out faces and fast mouths. The story moves at speed, with Ergüven constantly resisting the temptation to pause and wring sentiment from a dramatic development. One moment the sisters are as free as wild horses, the next the bone-dry narration by the youngest, Lale (Günes Sensoy), says, "The house became a wife factory that we never got out of."

The script is a masterclass in lean storytelling. Sorrow is expressed sparingly, and often dashed with a stoic sense of humour. Punchlines are usually an image, enabling the film to keep up the combined momentum of potently pleasurable visuals atop smooth narrative wheels. The sisters are photographed with reverence for their lithe beauty. Their physical similarities and the ease with which they drape themselves upon each other make it hard to figure out exactly who is who. As you do figure it out, it's because their numbers are dwindling. When this happens it becomes clear that this is Lale's story, which also scans as the story of all women who - at least temporarily - manage to transcend abuse. Warren Ellis' melancholic score, which works away in the background, has a chance to exert all its muscularity in a travel sequence, which is the film's sole moment of repose. It is a moment in which the losses and injustices of these girl children finally exerts their heavy weight.

SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN



The director of Mustang on why women must fight against conservative oppression.

eniz Gamze Ergüven's debut feature, *Mustang*, is a powerful critique of sexist Turkish cultural practices. Events are rooted in the director's formative experiences. Her family emigrated to Paris when she was a baby but remained "an island of Turkey". The film transcends the bleakness of its subject with beautiful and light-handed storytelling.

LWLies: What is the source of the real stories that inform many of the film's events? Ergüven: The little scandal that the girls trigger at the beginning of the film is something that we lived in my generation. The girls beaten in order of their ages happened in my mother's generation. In the newspaper, you always read about virginity reports. I wanted to know what was behind the scenes so I spoke with a gynaecologist who told me about that scene, which eventually ended up in the film as Selma's wedding night – she's taken to the hospital in the middle of the night by her husband's family because she hasn't bled. That was something a doctor told me as being an occurrence that

he comes across 40, 50 times a year in the wedding seasons – spring/summer. So three sets of reality. The one major difference is that the characters transcend those situations. If we triggered a scandal we didn't react as the characters. We didn't even say anything.

What is the process of turning facts into a fictionalised story? Once it starts off with characters being heroic, the ending had to be glorious, victorious in a way, even if it's shaded by the feeling of everything lost on the way. There's so many motives of fairy tale and even mythology. The girls for me are like a little hydra. They're one body with five heads. The uncle is some kind of Minotaur and he's Daedalus. Then it contaminates aesthetic choices. These are in no way naturalistic sets. They're chosen to look bigger than life. I wanted to make shots that could be drawings. The shot when you have the electrics coming off is like a little drawing. You see the contour of the village, you see the winding roads on the side of the sea.

Where is that beautiful location where events are set? It was on the coast of the Black Sea. We did 1,000 kilometres of location scouting. The check lists for the sets were so long. There was just one place that fitted perfectly. It was in the region of Kastamanu around the town of Inebolu.

Did you search equally hard to find the five young actresses? It was long months of auditioning a lot of girls. It was about who I can direct, who I can't direct. I never said, 'This is a bad actress. This is a good actress.' All five of them had great listening, great imagination and the capacity

to dive into scenes for long minutes. It was about being extremely playful, engaging into contact a lot. There were so many exercises. All those acting exercises and exercises you do to generate empathy and games where they had to do playful things like children, and engage in eye contact, hugging. In a group, you set the tone. Elit [Iscan, who plays Ece], the oldest one, had a great energy about getting the others to be in a sharing mood – not at all competitive, nobody was jumping for the camera. That never happened. They backed off when they knew it was the turn of somebody else.

Do you understand why some men see females only as sex objects? There's this way of wanting to be righteous which is not exactly in sync with human nature. There's a filter of sexualisation through which women are perceived. It's an idea that the main religions carry, a way of saying that women create disorder because they generate desire. The director Catherine Breillat has a thought that I really like: 'If we proceed with the same logic, we should cover up kids from head to toe because there are paedophiles.' If you start to organise societies to accommodate people who can't handle their desire, then it's going wrong. In Turkey, you have these festivals where you have lunches, which are home cooking. Housewives go into those businesses. It's their field most of the time. You often have a TV on with the Turkish equivalent of MTV. Near-naked women dancing in a very suggestive way. Those two sets of women across the room from each other - the ones veiled and the ones who are dancing half-naked say exactly the same thing: 'I'm a sexual object'. There's nothing half-way. Sex is maybe three per cent of your life. It's not 100 per cent 🚱





Our Kind of Traitor

Directed by SUSANNA WHITE Starring EWAN MCGREGOR, DAMIAN LEWIS, STELLAN SKARSGÅRD Released 13 MAY

The petition to secure Susanna White directing duties on the next Bond movie starts right here. This slick John le Carré adaptation is an exemplary calling card – she even manages to make Ewan McGregor seem like an intriguing screen presence. He plays a university professor called Perry who, unlike archetypal university professors, is always up for some fisticuffs. He's on holiday with his wife, Gail (Naomie Harris), and in the dog house for cheating with a student. But the healing process is interrupted when the pair are boozily thrown together with the charismatic Dima (Stellan Skarsgård) who just wants them to hand in an innocent flash drive to UK customs on their way back home. It turns out he's an accountant for the Russian Mafia, and a recent change of leadership has also resulted in a clearing out of old wood. The UK is the only chance he has to save his family from violent death.

For its first half, the film works like a dream, with the couple placing their cosy existence and trifling emotional traumas on the back-burner in order to help a man who – indirectly – is responsible for much death and destruction. It's like advanced couples therapy, displacing lengthy heart-to-hearts with heart-pounding adventure. But then it all falls away, with Harris being swept aside and a quaint, bromantic love affair erupting between Perry and Dima. The feeling is that White and screenwriter Hossein Amini are trying to force too much story into too little screen time, and so the film's final 45 minutes are a hot hash of hasty exposition, predictable twists and underwhelming action. If White does happen to get the Bond gig, then she might make for a neat pairing with Damien Lewis, who crops up here as an unflappable, lonely M15 stooge whose love of food and wine present him as an enlightened modern gent. DAVID JENKINS

ANTICIPATION. Room for another John le Carré screen adaptation?

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ENJOYMENT. Really nicely put together, even if the story falls apart.

63

IN RETROSPECT.
Susanna White: remember the name.

Chicken

Directed by JOE STEPHENSON
Starring SCOTT CHAMBERS, YASMIN PAIGE
MORGAN WATKINS
Released 20 MAY

Ature versus nurture is the name of the game in Joe Stephenson's directorial debut, *Chicken*. Despite its idyllic, Essex countryside settings, the film's characters are tethered to a machine hell bent on destruction, one that forever dredges up the putrid funk that abuse leaves behind. Stephenson eschews convention when presenting the constraints of living with learning difficulties, attempting to make a new and fresh statement. As the instantly loveable Richard, a boy who does not let his tumultuous past – or his present – hold him back, Scott Chambers delivers an inspired performance. He stuck with his tormented and abusive older brother, Polly (the brilliant Morgan Watson). Richard's careful, though meagre meal preparations in their squalid caravan are heartbreaking and the sole example of the love and tenderness you'd expect to see within a normal family.

Annabell (Yasmin Paige) bulldozes in with her fast-talking, city-girl slickness and fiery teenage 'tude, and Richard starts to emerge from his shell. The chemistry between the pair is palpable – he spurs her on to reconnect with her dormant imagination. Language is loaded, and terms such as 'freak' and 'chicken' are critiqued for their dark double-meanings. Paige, best known for her troubled seductress in Richard Ayoade's *Submarine*, brings frazzled teenage angst to the screen with great skill. However, in *Chicken*, she quickly grows into a more finely-shaded presence, adopting a maternal role and eventually displacing Richard's pet chicken Fiona (who, incidentally, is lovely).

Stephenson uses nature (and the conflicts within nature) as a metaphor for the complexity of human relationships. It's the stand out aspect of the film. When it reaches its cathartic peak – one of tragic Greek proportions – the symbol of the wild animal and its need for freedom shines through. For all of its tormented violence and hard-to-swallow subtext, *Chicken* is a film that shouldn't be passed by. **ELISA ADAMS**

ANTICIPATION. A boy and his chicken. Sounds like the making of a Sunday afternoon TV drama.

3

ENJOYMENT. A raw, hard-hitting and beautiful depiction of a troubled relationship.



IN RETROSPECT. A grand mixture of dark and light, that's not afraid to discuss tough topics in a refreshing way.







I Saw The Light

Directed by MARC ABRAHAM
Starring TOM HIDDLESTON, ELIZABETH OLSEN,
BRADLEY WHITFORD
Released 6 MAY

Refusing to take a leaf out of the book of its workaholic, 11-million selling country troubadour subject, Marc Abraham's *I Saw the Light* is a defiantly uncommercial take on the life a times of Hank Williams. He was a hellraiser with a glint in his eye who, if leading man Tom Hiddleston is to be believed, also had the broadest beaming smile on the circuit. At one point, Williams' slide guitar player bemoans that the songs they play – three-chord ditties that exist to please the masses – are too basic, and what Abraham has done in response is produce a very simple, straight, three-chord biopic which (unlike Hank's music) avoids sentimentality and trite romanticism.

The film takes place during the '40s and '50s, in and around the southern states, mostly Alabama and Nashville. It is built up of private episodes and a few hip-shuffling live performances, fused together via languid crossfades and largely shorn of exposition. Hiddleston's performance is highly entertaining, capturing Williams as a lanky, charismatic sweetheart. He doesn't wants you to love or hate his ol' Hank. He simply demands that you empathise with him, to see that while he did some things which might seem cowardly and obnoxious, he remained something of an innocent – that he made decisions without the mindset of a hayseed philosopher.

The musical performances are superb, with Hiddleston even nailing the famous segues into Appalachian yodelling that form the bridges of chart hits like 'Lovesick Blues'. Williams' various bouts of illness, much of it due to his drinking, but also his worsening spina bifida, are never used as a reason to justify his actions. The film understands that it must have been deeply troubling – both physically and psychologically – to have to shoulder these conditions. But he did so as best he could and it affected his character rather than fully shaping it. DAVID JENKINS

ANTICIPATION. Uh-oh, is this Tom Hiddleston's play for awards season credibility?

ENJOYMENT.
He's great in this ramblin', amblin' film.

IN RETROSPECT. *One of the better music biopics.*

a

Race

Directed by STEPHEN HOPKINS
Starring STEPHAN JAMES, JEREMY IRONS
CARICE VAN HOUTEN
Released 3 JUNE

D uring the 1936 Berlin Olympics, an African-American man named Jesse Owens won four gold medals, much to the chagrin of the Nazis sat in the stalls. With his film Race, director Stephen Hopkins wants us to believe that the unifying power of sport can overcome the divisiveness of politics, and so he places all subtlety to the side to force this sentimental notion down our throats. What Owens did was naturally spectacular. Drum rolls and confetti are not required.

Hopkins captures Owens' will of steel by plunging us into his pregame mindset: before the race, his coach tells him to disregard the crowd and concentrate on his inner self. The adrenaline spikes and, in a way, it feels a bit like watching an actual sporting event on TV. The film's production design is suitably luxe. Sometimes, however, it's hard not to feel that we're being talked down to. The seeds of Nazism are visible when an International Olympic Committee representative arrives in Berlin to assess the situation. The subsequent driving montage plays like a history lesson. The line between good and evil is also too simplistic, mostly when it comes to the supporting roles: Carice van Houten as Leni Riefenstahl and Jeremy Irons as the IOC representative deliver interesting turns that blur their relationships with the Nazi regime. Generally speaking, the cast is exemplary. Stephan James as Owens is entirely convincing as an elite athlete, but his portrayal is limited by the poor quality of the dialogue.

Plot-wise, the film plays out like a word-for-word rendering of Owens' Wikipiedia entry, even if the political context of the time is presented in a balanced and affecting manner. The horrors of racial segregation in Germany are laid bare, but we are also shown how things are not so different back home. Yet it's all too smooth to firmly resonate with fractious racial issues in contemporary America. MATHILDE DUMAZET

ANTICIPATION. Jesse Owens' exploits fully deserve a two-hour and a half movie.

3

ENJOYMENT.

All the ingredients are there, in large quantities...

2

IN RETROSPECT. But in the end, two-and-a-half hours is overcooking it a bit.







Dissent & Disruption: The Complete Alan Clarke at the BBC

Directed by ALAN CLARKE	Starring VARIOUS	1967-89	Released 23 MAY	DVD / Blu-ray
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es, we're singing hosannas to some films by a director who worked primarily in television. And yes, that sound you can hear is the cinephile purists gagging on their margaritas. And, in all honesty, we can't quite believe it either. But the truth of the matter is, watching the films made by the late, very great Alan Clarke for the BBC throughout the '60s, '70s and '80s, collected together for the first time in this extraordinary box-set, it's hard to accept that they were broadcast on the idiot box and not premiered at some rah-rah European film festival. Take 1988's *Elephant* – it's a vivid, terse examination of the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland which unfolds in a provocative experimental tenor, a sick joke repeated ad infinitum. In representing the cycle of tit-for-tat violence that dragged the region towards a blood-flecked apocalypse, Clarke simply retools the same episode in which a gunman walks shiftily through a building or down an alley, finds a man, shoots him, and runs off.

Dialling back three years you'll find a complimentary work in *Contact*, a tough-as-nails war movie that's shorn of all sentiment and simplistic morality. The Parachute Regiment scour the Northern Irish countryside to locate rebel fighters, their gung-ho approach to security making the casualties they suffer even harder to bare. Like *Elephant*, there are no traditional characters in the film, merely bodies gliding and parrying across the landscape. They exist as senseless targets for gunfire, land mines and car bombs. Like so many of Clarke's films, the concept of winners and losers, victory and defeat is wholly moot.

Military discipline colours much of the directors' most vital work. His treatise on Thatcher-era terrace violence, *The Firm*, from 1989, sees rival supporters' clubs organising armed skirmishes into enemy territory. Gary Oldman delivers perhaps his greatest performance as Clive "Bex" Bissell, a man(iac) who combines professional respectability with an almost pathological desire to engage in a form of metropolitan rough-and-tumble. Clarke's examination of this ultraviolent sub-culture doubles as a deconstruction of animalistic '80s self-annihilation. His lauded *Scum*, from 1977, presents informal borstal hierarchies that cultivate a culture of pure aggression. It chronicles life inside an institution, but like *Contact* and *The Firm*, it depicts that life as a struggle for survival.

As a director, Clarke adapted to the individual requirements of each screenplay a filmed while retaining a distinct personal imprint with each project. 1987's *Christine* is a matter-of-fact masterpiece about teenage drug addicts which is funny, surreal and horrific all at once. The abject monotony of this lifestyle is encapsulated in a looping structure similar to *Elephant*.

It follows a mildly dozy young girl (Vicky Murdock) returning home to a chintzy suburban house, injecting heroine and falling asleep in front of children's cartoons. Clarke strives for objectivity, making no move that could be construed as glamorising or offering rogue political comment. The same goes for 1975's *Diane*, a disarmingly gentle coming-of-age drama which dares to present incest as a quaint psychological issue rather than a crime or human defect.

Even though Clarke covered a range of subjects, there's seldom a point in his career where it didn't feel like he had a robust connection with his material. Take 1978's Nina, about Russian dissidents living in London – you could probably chalk it up as one of his lesser works because it's a rather conventional drama about weighing up personal happiness against public responsibility. Yet by its later scenes, where heroine Eleanor Bron breaks free from a patriarchal stranglehold that's been tightening around her over the film's runtime, you realise that Clarke was playing a longer game, looking at universal emotions rather than specific historical events. The Hallelujah Handshake, from 1970, also initially suggests itself as a simple tale of life in the modern church before brilliantly evolving into a heartbreaking essay on the nature of philanthropy and the impossibility of being a good person in the eyes of others.

Outliers such as the majestic *Penda's Fen* from 1973, based on a teleplay by David Rudkin, show Clarke's ability to weave complex ideas into simple structures. This ethereal ode to English pastoral life, folkloric tradition and sexual awakening rings of the early work of Terence Davies – high praise. 1975's *Baal*, meanwhile, gives David Bowie possibly his strongest (and strangest) acting role in an innovative Bertolt Brecht adaptation about a wandering, world-weary minstrel and poet who starts to question the very purpose of his existence.

One of his best and most well-known works is 1987's incendiary *Road*, which combines all the best elements of the above while remaining entirely its own thing. This survey of life on a typical Lancashire street brings the splenetic, confrontational dialogue of Jim Cartwright's script to the screen in all its gaudy, bruised glory. Incredible performances by an ensemble of actors who understand what Clarke is aiming for compete for supremacy, while the breathless finale contains all the convulsive delirium of a Southern baptist ministry. And all this is barely half of what is contained within this extraordinary set. Rarities and extras abound, lost films have been rescued and special features come in great abundance. It's a towering monument to one of Britain's most sublime and unassuming artists. **DAVID JENKINS**







Joshua Oppenheimer: Early Works

Directed by JOSHUA OPPENHEIMER	1996-2003
Starring VARIOUS	Released 27 JUNE
	DVD

hen, in 2012, The Act of Killing was dropped on an unsuspecting public, many were so dazzled by its revelatory mode of inquiry that few stopped to ask: where exactly did director Joshua Oppenheimer spring from? In true journalistic fashion, he had embedded himself in Indonesia in order to learn the language and customs which would result in a more comfortable connection with his violent subjects. This vital new DVD release helps to fill in some of the years prior to that, when Oppenheimer was feverishly experimenting with form and function. His militant instinct for social justice, however, appears fully formed. These Places We've Learned to Call Home from 1996 is an intriguing, medium-length work co-directed with Jacob Silber, which plants the seeds of Oppenheimer's interest in using film as a way to infiltrate extreme political movements. His follow-up, 1998's The Entire History of the Louisiana Purchase, is a mischievous fictional documentary and also a major step up in terms of ambition and artistry. It is the story of a woman who believes that she had given birth via immaculate conception, and so later decides to murder her baby by putting it in a microwave. The ropebridge that connects his early experiments to his lauded later works is finally complete with furious 2003 video piece, The Globalisation Tapes, about the very sorry lot of Indonesian palm oil harvesters. Oppenheimer's outrage is palpable, and as such he pummels the screen with slogans, statistics, and even what could be his first candid interview with a cackling warlord who boasts of abusing and murdering field workers. This is a disquieting and essential set from Second Run DVD, which comes bundled with various other micro-shorts which help to complete the full, grotesque fresco of Oppenheimer's meteoric rise. DAVID JENKINS



Suture

Directed by SCOTT MCGEHEE, DAVID SIEGEL	1993
Starring DENNIS HAYSBERT	Released 20 JUNE
MEL HARRIS SAB SHIMONO	Blu-ray

hen the annals of '90s American indie film are finally written, it's likely that Scott McGehee and David Siegel's stylish 1993 neo-noir will get a namecheck rather than its own dedicated chapter. While you're watching, you have to constantly jolt yourself into remembering that it was made in the pre-digital era, because it's the type of movie that could only be allowed into the world today were it made on the slimmest of budgets. Back then, it's tough to even imagine how this one was let out of the cage (apparently Steven Soderbergh saw an early cut and pulled some strings to secure completion funds). That's absolutely not to say it's a bad movie – on the contrary. But it exists in the odd zone between the accepted face of Tarantino-era cool, and something more overtly and wantonly experimental.

An impoverished black crane operator, Clay Arlington (Dennis Haysbert), meets with his white, angular brother Vincent Towers (Michael Harris) following their father's funeral. The former attempts to murder the latter so he can assume his identity and take off with their inheritance, but Clay survives and has both body and memory stitched back together. Filmed in high contrast monochrome, the conceit at the centre of the film is that no-one seems to notice that the brothers look nothing like one another, proposing the idea of Clay as more of an abstraction than a real person. The film explores the nature of memory, the signs and symbols that help to unlock the sunken repositories of the unconscious, and whether we can ever truly rebuild a person to be an exact replica of what they were before. It looks a dream, and it's invigorating to see an example of ambitious independent cinema before everyone got an iPhone and became a filmmaker. DAVID JENKINS









Stuff and Dough

Directed by CRISTI PUIU Starring ALEXANDRU PAPADOPOL DRAGOS BUCUR IOANA FLORA Blu-ray

t's supremely satisfying to discover that a great director was making quality movies before he was officially inducted into the hallowed halls of moviedom. Romania's Cristi Puiu cemented his status as 'one to watch' when his 2006 film, *The Death of Mr Lazarescu*, which documented the final, undignified hours in the life of a dirt-poor pensioner, was lauded at the Cannes Film Festival. Roll back five years, and his spiky debut feature, *Stuff and Dough*, had already strongly hinted at his capabilities as a unblinking social observer, a darkly humorous satirist, and a showman capable of whipping up scenes of frazzled intensity from nothing.

This film, liberated from the archives by the great Second Run DVD, initially comes across as a bouncy Romanian Gen X movie, in which a trio of hapless slackers are posted on a four hour drive to Bucharest to drop off a package of "medical supplies" for which they are being paid handsomely by a local mobster. Yet the fun, frolics and opportunity to holler abuse at fellow road users comes to an abrupt end when a mysterious red Jeep turns up on their tail. The kids don't know what to do, and comedy switches instantly to thriller. Maybe even horror. Puiu's masterstroke is that he films the action from a single camera, as if the audience are right there in the van, susceptible to the brutal compulsions of the burley men in the trailing vehicle. But all this is pretence, as what the director is really interested in is showing Romania as a country so engulfed with corruption and violence that freedom is no longer an option. It's perhaps not the most sophisticated or nuanced of statements, but there's something uniquely pleasurable about watching a film where you're never sure whether you should be laughing or weeping. DAVID JENKINS

In a Lonely Place

Directed by NICHOLAS RAY	1950
Starring HUMPHREY BOGART	Released 16 MAY
GLORIA GRAHAME FRANK LOVEJOY	Blu-ray

he world has gone to all hell in Nicholas Ray's noxious 1950 showbiz satire, In a Lonely Place. It's a film in which the purportedly glamorous job of movie screenwriter is characterised by tedium, repetition and lots of late night drinking. Even a brutal roadside slaying is treated with a drowsy sigh rather than an astonished scream. Humphrey Bogart plays Dixon 'Dix' Steele, a punch-clock movie writer who calls on the coat check girl at his local bar to précis a doorstop novel he's supposed to be adapting. She does her job and Dix sends her packing, but the next morning the police are on his doorstep and he's the key suspect in an after-hours murder. A carefully placed narrative ellipsis means that the audience are left questioning Dix's innocence - it seems unlikely that he did it, but he does have a violent streak a mile wide, meaning that his typist girlfriend Laurel (Gloria Grahame) is left with nagging doubts. The film exists in a strange space between the classic, twisting whodunit and a more artful examination of the questions we have to leave unanswered when entering into a romantic relationship. The 'lonely place' of the title is the interior life known only to the individual, the suppressed compulsions and the dark thoughts that we'd never think to share. Dix's refusal to proclaim his innocence loudly and firmly is a sticking point. Yet his indifference towards this young girl's death might be a result of his career - he's been left wholly desensitised to such violent melodramas. Whatever the reason, it's a vital plot point which lacks emotional credibility for the sake of making him seem like more of a viable culprit. This Criterion Collection release contains David Helpern's 1975 documentary profile of Ray, I'm a Stranger Here Myself. DAVID JENKINS









Blood and Black Lace

Directed by MARIO BAVA	1964
Starring CAMERON MITCHELL	Released 5 JULY
EVA BARTOK THOMAS REINER	Blu-ray
	-

can think of at least two things wrong with that title." This was Nelson Muntz's pithy review of David Cronenberg's Naked Lunch, and it also applies to Mario Bava's brutally violent proto-giallo, Blood and Black Lace, from 1964. There might be a few lace-lined skimpies if you searched hard enough, but blood? Not really. A couple of wounds, some suppurating scars, a few drops mixing with some bath water, but no actual, honest-to-goodness red stuff. Instead of going hard and strong on gory gloop, Bava builds a world around the iconography of blood, with his ensemble of lithe meat puppets metaphorically drowned in it as they flounder for survival. A dim external staircase has a red carpet running down it. A bedroom has a bright red lampshade. The fashion emporium in which the story takes place uses a red telephone, and scattered across its shop floor are terrifying, faceless mannequins upholstered in red velvet. A masked murdered is out in force, on the trail of a redleather diary containing all manner of dirty secrets. Models are killed off in protracted, horrific struggles. The violence is visceral and highly physical. It's tough to watch, as Bava focuses on sustained moments of suffering such as interrogation or strangulation. It's not so much a case of style trumping substance, that the style is the substance. A creeping camera, a trick POV, two coloured lights crossing streams and creating a third colour. It's almost amusing to see an artist divert so much care and attention towards making a movie this tawdry. But it's a masterclass in screen style, how to lay it on thick and still jangle the nerves in the process. This 2K restoration from Arrow Films gets the best from Bava's lurid stylings and their two-disk set comes jam-packed with beautifully curated contextual extras. DAVID JENKINS

The 5,000 Fingers of Dr T

Directed by ROY ROWLAND	1953
Starring TOMMY RETTIG	Released 7 JUNE
HANS CONRIED MARY HEALY	Blu-ray

fascinating '50s folly gets a deserved Blu-ray upgrade in Roy Rowland's colourfully camp atomic-age musical, *The 5,000 Fingers* of Dr T. It's a film that sits firmly in the, 'how the sweet Jesus did this get made?' file, an eccentric whatsit direct from the mellow-yellow brainpan of kiddie fabulist Dr Seuss. It tells of an apple-cheeked young scamp (Tommy Rettig) who finds his piano lessons boring and his flouncing teacher something of an pretentious irritant. He drifts into a featurelength daze which just happens to resemble MC Escher goes to day-glo storytown, and ends up dashing about gigantic, brightly lit sound stages trying to foil the nefarious plans of the evil Dr T (Hans Conried). These plans involve opening a piano institute and coercing schoolboys (no girls for some reason?) to practice on a piano whose keyboard snakes into the infinite. If you haven't heard of the name Roy Rowland before, it's because on this evidence he was an awful director, using elaborate production design and costumes as an excuse to just film everything in tedious medium-shot. There are even sequences where characters just stand like lemons in the background waiting for two other characters to finish their dialogue exchange. Had this been injected with a little more pep and humour, you could see it existing as a druggy mid-century classic. It does find its feet, however, in time for the musical numbers, especially a jolly hoedown about the weather, and a show-stopper about musical instruments that pays homage to Benjamin Britten's 'The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra'. Venerably liberal in its outlook, it's a story that ends up espousing the joys of free play, personal decision making and adventure over having a camp, demagogic intellectual forcing his will upon you. A fun failure, and certainly worth a late-night watch. DAVID JENKINS









La Chienne

Directed by JEAN RENOIR	1931
Starring MICHEL SIMON	Released 14 JUNE
GEORGES FLAMANT JANIE MARÈSE	Blu-ray

here's a staggering amount of incident in Jean Renoir's 1931 film La Chienne (translation: The Bitch), a story based on a novel by Georges de La Fouchardière and which was also adapted for the screen by Fritz Lang as Scarlet Street in 1945. Michel Simon is a paragon of the pathetic as Maurice Legrand, a sadsack post office clerk with a mound of centre-parted hair, tiny spectacles and a sexless marriage. He paints to kill the time, and he's pretty good. One fateful night, he happens across Janie Marèse's chiselling strumpet, Lucienne, and decides at that moment that he's going to do everything in his power to win her heart, even though she's going steady with small-time crook Dede (Georges Flamant). Lucienne sees what's happening and decides to rinse the sap for all he's worth, selling off his paintings and keeping him at arm's length with bogus promises of intimacy. Renoir opens the film with a Punch and Judy show and a narration explaining that there is no moral to this story, but he's being funny with us. This comic set-up dives into a tragic tailspin where we're shown the grisly upshot of unchecked lust. Renoir's direction dazzles, his camera apparently desperate to break away from observing these reprobates and assure that the world is full of hidden beauty. We are made to feel sorry for Maurice and to despise Lucienne, making the message of the film that young, beautiful and carefree people exist solely to tread on the pitiful mopes. It's a beautifully bleak glance at Renoir's roots, made all the more interesting by the fact that this fictional tale played out almost identically in real life. This new Criterion Collection disc comes bundled with the director's first sound film (this is his second), evocatively titled Baby's Laxitive. DAVID JENKINS

The Taking of Pelham One Two Three

Directed by JOSEPH SARGENT	1974
Starring WALTER MATTHAU	Released 5 JULY
ROBERT SHAW MARTIN BALSAM	Blu-ray

f the '80s was the decade of now, then the '70s was the decade of no. Films like The French Connection, The Conversation and Taxi Driver made the defiant claim that good endings didn't need to be happy endings. It seems that director Joseph Sargent missed that memo when adapting John Godey's hit novel 'The Taking of Pelham One Two Three,' barrelling full steam towards an air-punching endorsement of robust American law enforcement. From the outset, this looks to be one of those stories where, if the forces of evil don't necessarily win out, then they at least brand their indelible mark onto the psyche of our valiant hero. A (fake) moustache-twirling Robert Shaw has devised a fiendish scheme to strike it rich by muscling on to the eponymous New York subway train and then taking the passengers hostage. We learn the minute particulars of his plan as he executes it. A furtive Sargent observes as his small cadre of crooks perform their roles as if they've been practicing for a lifetime. Unlucky for them, schlubby transport cop Zachary Garber (Walter Matthau) is on the beat, and while the miscreants treat him as little more than a stooge to carry out their demands, his years of hard graft help him to use any tiny slip-ups to his advantage. The first hour of the film is lean meat, trimmed of all gristle. The dingy colour of the subway platforms, tunnels and control room are entirely incidental, with the camera monitoring a process rather than building a world. The hostages don't seem too bothered that their lives are on the line, and the mayor is wavering on whether they are even worth the ransom. The film is an example of when second-guessing the desires of an audience and assuming they'll be happy to see the criminals foiled ends up harming its overall quality. DAVID JENKINS

Mannequin

- DIRECTED BY -

- STARRING -

Michael Gottlieb

Andrew McCarthy Kim Cattrall James Spader

- TRAILERS -

- CHERRYPICK -

The Tzar Wept Anew, Night of the War Tubas, Chess vs. Scrabble "We humans are little more than an occasionally entertaining collection of nose hair and toejam." Just because Jonathan's fallen in love with a piece of wood, if doesn't make him a dummy!

- TAGLINE -

- RELEASED -

'Making her move February 13th at theatres everywhere!'

1987

ou may never have heard of Joe Farrell, but boy has he heard of you! Not you, with your strange and brittle dreams, unexceptional everyday tendernesses and mutinous sexual peccadilloes. But the You that makes up the big They. The great unwashed that PT Barnum had in mind when he threatened to 'Give them what they want.' The PayPal drones Steve Jobs salivated over as he steepled his fingers like a Bond baddie and proclaimed, 'They don't know what they want until you show it to them.' Joe Farrell was the market research oracle who discovered a Third Way of 'They': 'Collect all the fetid slop from their garbage, water it down with bromide and bleach, distill the resultant slurry into multi-quadrant entertaino-globs. Then smear into their every orifice til they are blind to anything but colourful shapes and deaf to anything but explosions and nonsensical one-liner kiss-offs.'

In the '80s and '90s, Joe Farrell stalked the preview screening rooms of Hollywood like some metrics-mad mantis. He had the ear of studio bosses, and if his data – driven by the mule-heads, stoners and radio phone-in elite of drive-time America – told him a movie wasn't working, out came the magic toolbox. It was Farrell who dictated Glenn Close's spurned homewrecker should not bow out of *Fatal Attraction* in the traditional haze of red wine and slurred latenight answerphone threats, but be blown away in the bathtub. Farrell's monkey barrel also suggested that if the studio shoehorned a few gunfights among the bone-reducing saccharine of Costner/Houston vehicle *The Bodyguard*, teenage boys would have something to goggle at while trying to get their hands on their girlfriends' Milk Duds. And would anyone have gone to see *Pretty Woman* if it had been called *The Ho and the Schmoe*? No.

It was only a matter of time before Hollywood dealt Farrell a free hand to build his own movie. Sure, he knew how to not do it wrong, but could he do it just plain right? The experiment would burnish Tinseltown's halo either way: succeed and they'd have picked another winner, fail and it was proof that their arcane studio augury was real. It was Hollywood's biggest bar bet, but Joe wasn't a betting man. He liked a sure thing. He wasn't going to break the mould on this one. In fact, his main character would be cast in a mould.

1987's Mannequin is the story of a priapic NY window-dresser and his living doll. It is, depending how you look at it, a curious playdate between Pygmalion and Pinocchio set against the splendid, old-timey elegance of a frou-frou department store, or an onanistic rape fantasy that commodifies women into poseable fashion accessories while constantly reminding the audience to buy shit they don't need with cash they don't have. And in that audience, that number-crunched vector of B2C KPI feedback loops, Mary-Sue gets to swoon over the romance, Junior has another sinew joyously snipped from his weak grasp of delayed gratification, and Ma and Pa tap their Timberlands to the accompanying #1 hit single by hippy sellouts Jefferson Starship. They even drafted in James Spader to mollify the art-house goons and a black homosexual character (known in certain Hollywood circles as a 'Twofer') to sate, amuse and enrage a broiling multitude of key minority demographics. And look - your seat even has a cup holder. For your Big Gulp. Which is produced by The Coca-Cola Company, which owns Columbia Pictures, who own this theatre, and who payed Joe Farrell to make this picture. There. Don't you feel safe now? So, so safe? Say it. Just say the word and Uncle Joe will make the pain go away 🐯







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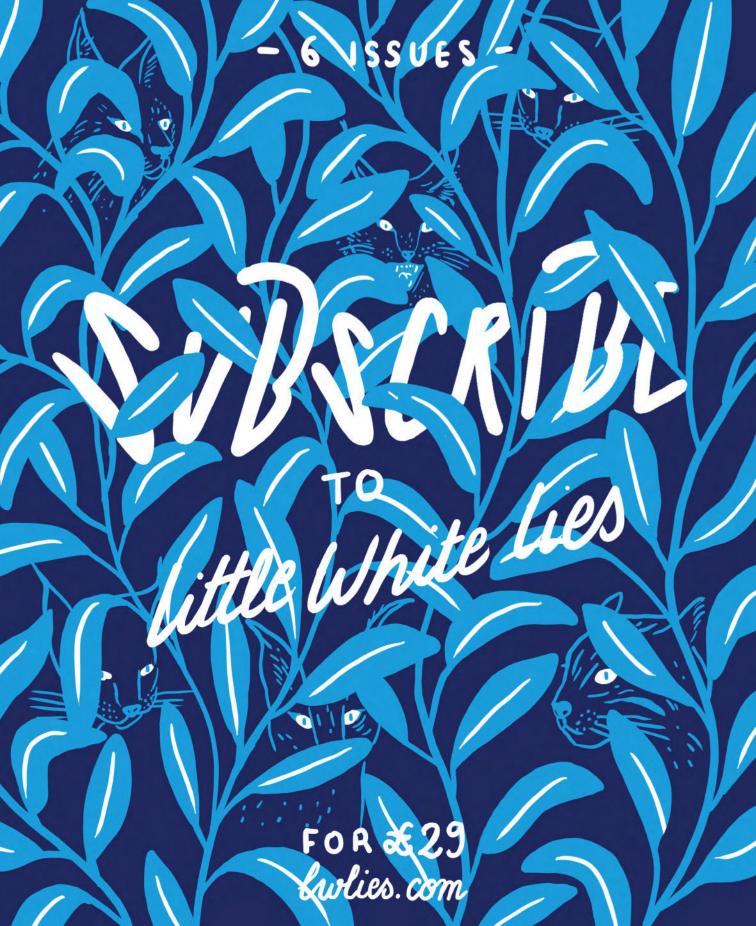
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Little White Lies

Published by TCOLondon Little White Lies – Huck - 71a

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Cover by Boris Pelcer

The articles appearing in this publication reflect the opinions of their respective authors and not necessarily those of the publishers or editorial team.

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Published by

TCOLondon Publishing 71a Leonard Street London EC2A 4QS UK +44 (0) 207-729-3675 tcolondon.com info@tcolondon.com

LWLies is published five times a year

Advertise with us George Jennings george@tcolondon.com +44 (0) 207-729-3675

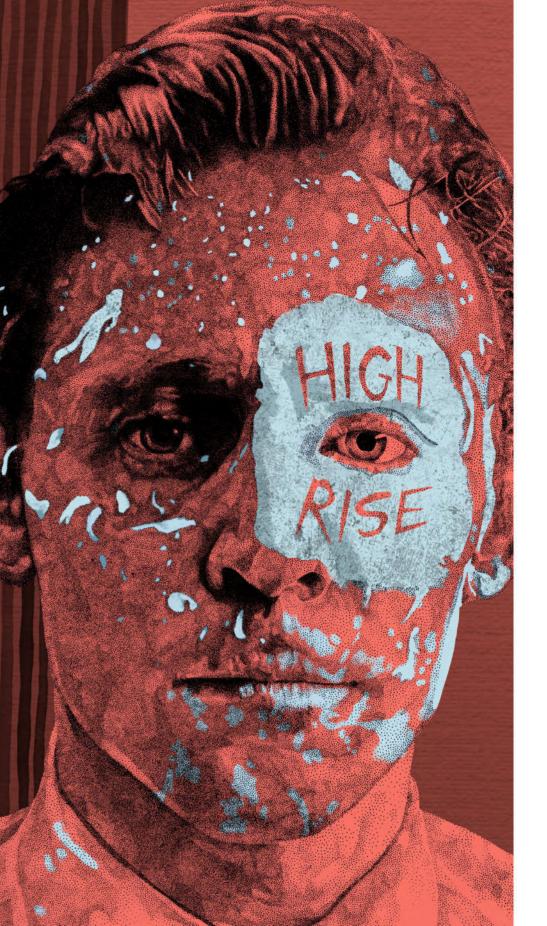
Stock the magazine

Distributed worldwide by Comag Brian Donnelly brian.donnelly@comag.com +44 (0) 189-543-3684

Printed by Jimenez Godov

lwlies.com

Words, pictures, thanks... Elisa Adams, Lola Beltrán, Anton Bitel, Adam Chapman, Phil Concannon, Adam Lee Davies, Mathilde Dumazet, Glenn Heath Jr, Trevor Johnston, Elena Lazic, Manuela Lazic, Michael Leader, Christina Newland, Vadim Rizov, Emma Simmonds, Josh Slater-Williams, Matt Thrift.



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